

UNIT 3 REPORTS AND PROPOSALS

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section you will learn about **the** formal elements of a report – those components of a report that are usually included in a formal report in business and industry. However **organisations** very often have their own formal **preferences** and it would be useful for you to study a few successful reports in your **organisations** records.

Objectives

After studying **this** unit you will **be** able to

- write various **type** of Reports,
- prepare a proposal for a project, and
- prepare a project report.

3.2 FORMAL ELEMENTS OF A REPORT

A report is expected to have the following components :

- 1) Letter of transmittal
- 2) Title page
- 3) Abstract
- 4) Tables of content
- 5) List of illustrations
- 6) Executive summary
- 7) The body (varies according to the type of report)
- 8) Glossary and list of symbols
- 9) Appendix

It would be useful to remember that the components of a report are not written in the order in which they appear. For example the letter of transmittal which is placed at the beginning of the report would normally be written after the report has been prepared. The body of the report is written before any of the other formal elements. After that you may write the executive summary and the abstract, even the appendices, the glossary and a list of symbols and finally the table of contents, title page and letter of transmittal.

3.2.1 The Letter of Transmittal

The letter of transmittal introduces the purpose and content of the report. It is important because it is the first thing the reader sees, it establishes a courteous and graceful tone for the report. The letter of transmittal is an opportunity to emphasise whatever the reader would find particularly important or interesting in the report. Such letters would generally contain most of the following elements :

- i) A statement of the title and if necessary the purpose of the report.
- ii) A statement about the commissioning authority and the date of commissioning.
- iii) A statement about the methods used in the project and/or the principal results, conclusions and recommendations,
- iv) An acknowledgement of any assistance received in preparing the materials.
- v) A gracious offer to assist in interpreting the materials or in carrying out further projects.

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY, INC.
Hauz Khas, New Delhi-16

April 3, 19 --

Rivers Power Company
15740 Malabar Road
Mumbai, 400018

Attention: Dr. Manoj
Project Engineering Manager

Subject : Project #619-103-823

Gentleman.

We are pleased to submit "A Proposal for the Riverfront Energy Project" in response to your request of February 6, 19 - .

The windmill design described in the attached proposal uses the most advanced design and materials. Of particular note is the state-of-the-art storage facility described on pp.14-17. As you know, storage limitations are crucial factor in the performance of a generator such as this.

In preparing this proposal, we inadvertently omitted one paragraph on p. 26 of the bound proposal. That paragraph is now on the page labeled 26k We regret this inconvenience.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call us.

Yours very truly,


Praveen Chauhan |
Project Manager

Enclosures 2

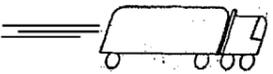
2.2 The Title Page

The title page includes the title, the date of submission and the name and position of the writer and principal reader.

A good title is informative without being unwieldy. It answers two basic questions :

- i) What is the subject of the report ?
- ii) What type of a report is it?

A convenient way to define the type of report is to use a generic term such as analysis, commendation, summary, review, guide or instructions, e.g. Petroleum prices in the nineties : A review

<p>PETROLEUM PRICES FOR THE NINETIES: A FORECAST</p>	
Prepared for	: Ajit Kumar, President Reliance Trucking Co.
by	: N. Venkat, Manager Purchasing Department Reliance Trucking Co.
April 19, 19- -	
	
<p>RELIANCE TRUCKING CO. <i>moving with the times since 1942</i></p>	

2.3 The Abstract

The Abstract has been viewed in detail in the preceding unit.

2.4 The Table of Contents

This is crucial to the report because it enables different readers to turn to specific pages and find the information they want.

The heading listed in the contents are the headings that appear in the report itself. A table of contents which simply lists general headings would be an ineffective one, e.g.:

TABLE OF CONTENTS	
Introduction	1
Materials	5
Methods	8
Results	20
Recommendations	40
References	45
Appendix	50

To make the headings more informative, you need to combine generic and specific terms, as in the following examples :

Recommendation : Five ways to improve

You would also need to keep in mind some basic aspects of formatting like – font size, indentation, outline style or decimal-style headings. However the same format as used in the headings in the text should be adhered to.

3.2.5 The List of Illustrations

A list of illustrations is a table of the contents for the graphic aids in a report.

3.2.6 The Executive Summary

The Executive Summary is a one page condensation of the report. This is for busy managers who need a broad understanding of the various projects undertaken in their organisations.

The effective Executive Summary has two parts

- Background
- Major findings and implications

While writing an executive summary you need to keep in mind that it is written specifically for a non-technical audience, therefore you need to avoid use of specialised vocabulary and reference to specialised concepts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Presently, we monitor our distribution system using after-the-fact indicators such as interruption reports, meter readings, and trouble alarms. This system is inadequate in two respects. First, it fails to give us an accurate picture of the dynamics of the distribution system. To ensure enough energy for our customers, we must overproduce. Last year we overproduced by 7 percent, or a loss of Rs.273,000. Second, it is expensive. Escalating labour costs for meter readers and the increased number of "difficult-to-access" residences have led to higher costs. Last year we spent Rs.960,000 reading the meters of 12,000 such residences. This report describes a project to design a radio-based system for a pilot project on these 12,000 homes.

The basic system, which uses packet-switching technology, consists of a base unit (built around a personal computer), a radio link, and a remote unit.

The radio-based distribution monitoring system described in this report is feasible because it is small enough to replace the existing meters and because it is simple to use. It would provide a more accurate picture of our distribution system, and it would pay for itself in 3.9 years. We recommend installing the system on a trial basis. If the trial program proves successful, radio-based distribution-monitoring techniques will provide the best long-term solution to the current problems of inaccurate and expensive data collection.

3.2.7 The Glossary

A Glossary is an alphabetical list of definitions. It is particularly useful if you are addressing a multiple audience that includes readers who will not be familiar with technical vocabulary used in your report.

3.2.8 The Appendix

An Appendix is an action that follows the body of the report (and the list of references or bibliography, and glossary). It provides a convenient way to convey information that is too bulky to be presented in the body. Examples of materials found in appendixes include maps, large technical diagrams or charts, computations, computer printouts, test data, and text of supporting documents.

3.2.9 A Report Writer's Checklist

- 1) Does the transmittal letter
 - a) Clearly state the title and, if necessary, the subject and purpose of the report?
 - b) State who authorized or commissioned the report?
 - c) Briefly state the methods you used?
 - d) Summarize your major results, conclusions, or recommendations?
 - e) Acknowledge any assistance you received?
 - f) Courteously offer further assistance?

- 2) Does the title page
 - a) Include a title that both suggests the subject of the report **and** identifies the type of report it is?
 - b) List the **names** and positions of both you and your principal readers?
 - c) Include the date of submission of the report and any other identifying information?
- 3) Does the **abstract**
 - a) List your **name**, the report title, and any other identifying information?
 - b) Clearly define the problem or opportunity that led to the project?
 - c) Briefly describe (when appropriate) the research methods?
 - d) Summarize the major results, conclusions, or recommendations?
- 4) Does the table of contents
 - a) Clearly identify the executive summary?
 - b) **Contain** a sufficiently detailed breakdown of the major sections of the body of the report?
 - c) Reproduce the headings as **they** appear in your report?
 - d) Include page numbers?
- 5) Does the list of illustrations (or tables or figures) include all the graphic aids included in the body of the report?
- 6) Does the executive summary
 - a) Clearly state the problem or opportunity that led to the project?
 - b) Explain the major results, conclusions, **recommendations**, and/or managerial implications of your report?
 - c) Avoid **technical** vocabulary and concepts that the managerial audience is not likely to know?
- 7) Does the glossary include **definitions** of all the technical terms your readers might not know?
- 8) Do your appendices include the supporting materials?

3.3 GUIDELINES FOR WRITING AN EFFECTIVE REPORT

The major tasks before you **when** you wish to write a report are

- **Getting** started
- **Organising** the information, arranging it **in** the proper order
- **The writing** : getting the right **words** down on paper

The first task **can** be simplified if you ask yourself

- Who is my reader?
- What do I most want to tell my reader?

i.e. **you need** to analyze your audience **and** **define** the purpose of writing (see Unit 1)

Now we need to see how to write **the** body of the report.

The Report Writer's Pyramid Method

The pyramid method helps to emphasise the most important information by bringing it right up front, where the reader will see it easily.

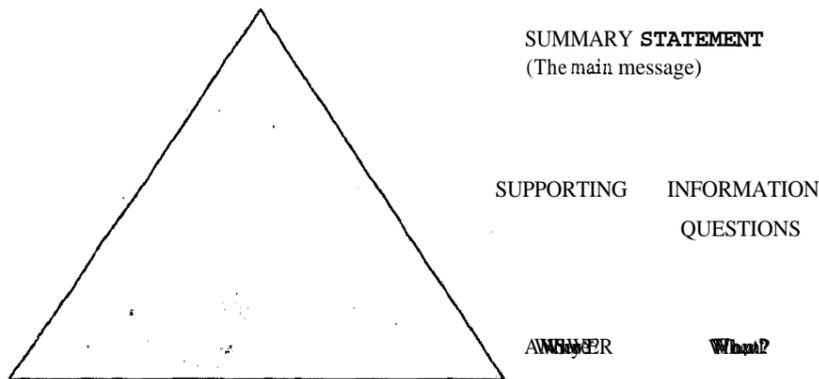


Figure 3.1: The Report Writer's Pyramid

The Pyramid is used as the basic framework for organising every type of report, although the compartments may be related and expanded to suit varying situations.

We may for example develop the Pyramid further.

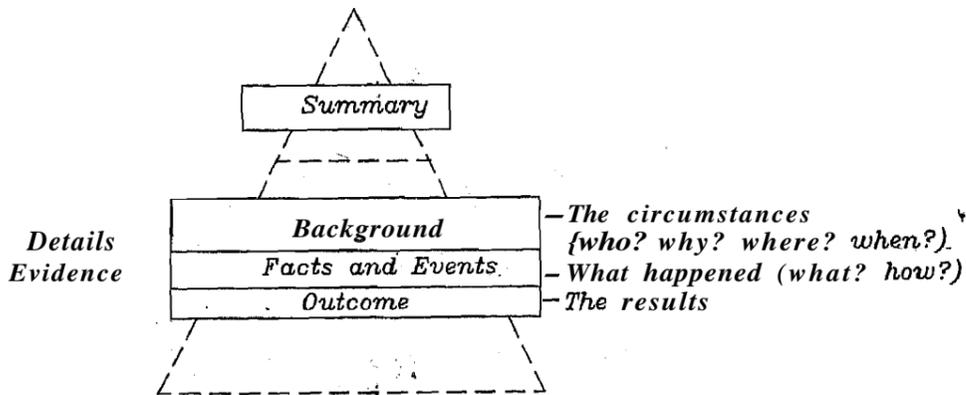


Figure 3.2: The Main Components of a Report

In the longer reports the basic compartments shown above may be sub-divided to accommodate more information and to improve internal organisation. These sub-divisions occur mostly in the **Facts** and **Events** compartments.

In a long report the different sections **within** the report can also be structured as **individual pyramids**, so that the smaller pyramids are vested within the overall pyramid.

SAQ 1

Name the formal elements of a report.

SAQ 2

What is the report writer's pyramid?

3.4 INCIDENT REPORTS

An incident report (sometimes called an occurrence report) describes an event that has happened, explains how and why it occurred, and indicates what effect the event had and what has been done about it. It may also suggest that corrective action be taken, or what should be done to prevent the event from recurring.

The writing compartments are similar to those of the basic report writers' pyramid and are shown in the figure below.

- The **Background** compartment answers the questions *Who?*, *Why?*, *Where?* and *When?*
- The **Event** and **Outcome** compartments answer the questions *How?* and *What?*

The depth of detail provided in each compartment depends on the importance of the event and how much the reader wants or needs to know. For example, if you were informing your company's accountant of an unexpected expense that caused you to overrun your project budget by a small sum, you would write just a brief report. But if you were describing an accident that hospitalized two employees and cost a substantial amount in repair work, you would be expected to write a detailed report that describes the circumstances and the corrective action that was taken.

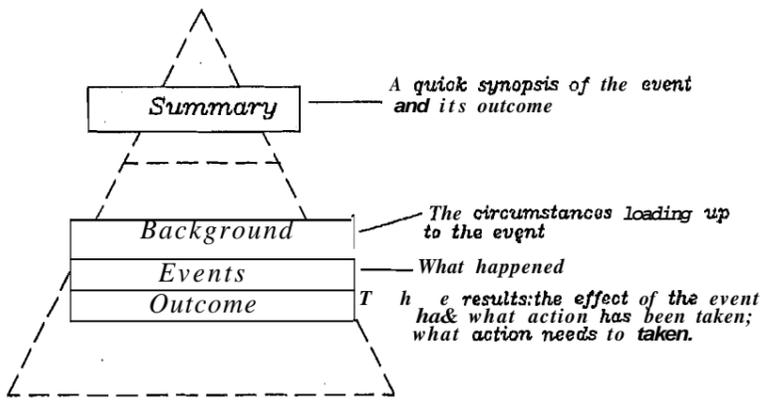


Figure 3.3: Writing Compartments for an Incident Report

3.5 TRIP REPORTS

Trip reports are written whenever people leave their usual place of work to do something elsewhere. Their reports can cover many kinds of events, such as

- Installation or modification of equipment,
- Assistance on field project,
- Attendance at a conference, seminar, or workshop,
- Repairs to a client's equipment or field instruments, or
- Evaluation of another firm's buildings, facilities, or methods.

Whatever the circumstances, the writing compartments for a field trip report are essentially the same as those for the basic report writing relabeled **The Job**, as shown below:

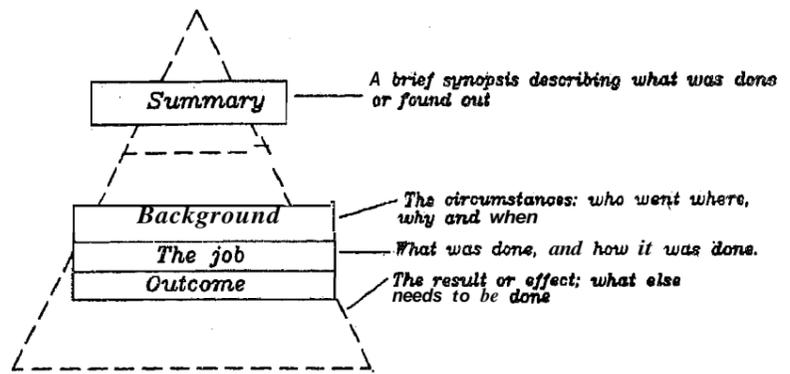


Figure 3.4: Writing Compartments for a Trip Report

These compartments generally contain the following information :

- o The Background compartment describes the purpose of the trip, mentions on whose authority it was taken, and lists circumstantial details such as the names of people involved, dates, and locations.
- o The Job compartment describes what was done. Often, it can be broken down into four sub-compartments :
 - 1) What the report writer set out to do?
 - 2) What was actually done?
 - 3) What could not be done, and why?
 - 4) What else was done?

The fourth sub-compartment is necessary because people on field trips often find themselves doing things beyond the purpose of their assignment. For example, a technician sent to repair a defective diesel power unit at a remote radar site may be asked by the on-site staff to look at a second unit that is "running rough" and spend six hours adjusting its timing cycle. The time spent on this additional work must be accounted for, and the work must be described in the trip report.

- o The Outcome compartment sums up the results of the trip and, if further work still needs to be done or follow-up action should be taken, suggests what is necessary and even how and by whom it should be accomplished.

Many trip reports are short and simply follow the compartment arrangement in a few paragraphs. Some longer, more detailed trip reports may need headings to break up the narrative into visible compartments. Typical headings might be :

Summary

Assignment Details

- Purpose } (Background)
- Authority } (Background)
- Personnel } (Background)
- Location } (Background)
- Duration of Trip } (Background)

- Assigned Work Completed } (The Job)
- Problems Encountered } (The Job)
- Additional Work Done } (The Job)

- Results Achieved } (Outcome)
- Follow-up Action Required } (Outcome)

Trip reports are often written as interoffice memorandums from the person who made the trip (or was in charge of a group of people who did the job as a team) to that person's supervisor or manager. Often, too, they are written in the first person - "I" if the writer was alone, and "We" if several people were involved. The first person has been used in both example trip reports that follow. They comprise

- Report on a field installation
- A report on seminar attendance

3.6 INSPECTION REPORT

An inspection report is similar to a field trip report in that its writer has usually gone somewhere to inspect something.

Other typical situations requiring an inspection report to be written include

- Examination of a building to determine its suitability as a storage facility,
- Inspection of construction work, such as a bridge, building, or road,
- Checks on manufactured items, to assure they are of the required quality, and
- Inspection of goods ordered for a job, to check that the correct items and quantities have been received.

The writing compartments are also similar to those for a trip report, except that the compartment previously labeled "The Job" is more clearly defined as "Findings." The report writing pyramid is illustrated below.

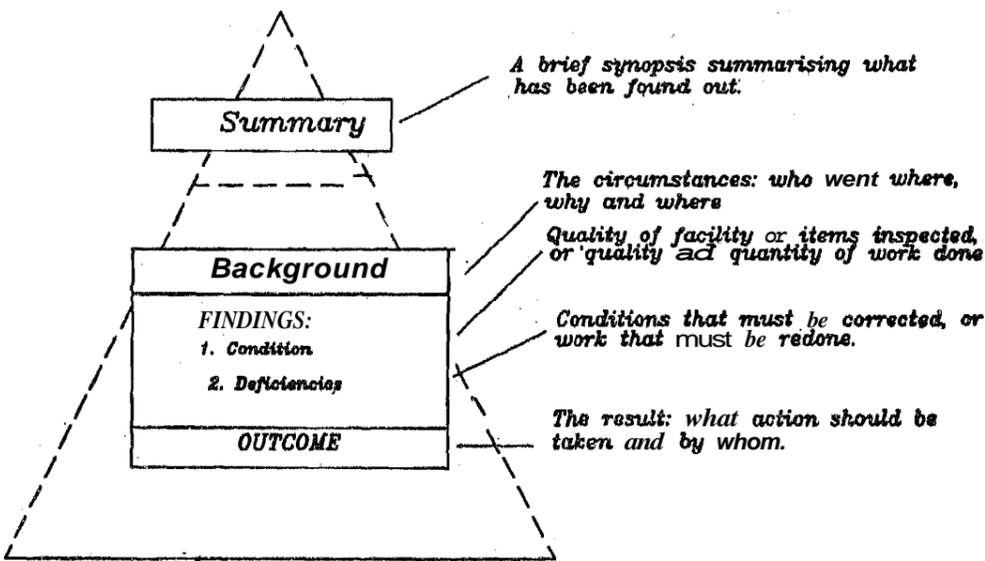


Figure 3.5: Writing Compartments of an Inspection Report

The following notes suggest what these compartments should contain and how the information should be arranged.

- **The Background compartment** describes the purpose of the inspection, mentions on whose authority it was performed, and lists circumstantial details such as the names of people involved and the date and location of the inspection.
- The Findings compartment is best divided into two sub-compartments, one to describe **conditions found** and the other to list **deficiencies** (a deficiency can be either an unacceptable condition or a missing item). The length and complexity of the findings dictate how these compartments are organised. Short, simple findings are arranged in this order :

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____ (etc.)

Deficiencies :

1. _____
2. _____ (etc.)

Longer, more complex findings should be arranged so that the deficiencies for each item are listed immediately after the item's condition has been described.

Inspection Findings :

Item A:

Condition

Deficiencies

Item B:

Condition

Deficiencies(etc.)

Try to use a miniature pyramid to organise the information in each of the **Conditions** Found and **Deficiencies** sub-compartments, as shown below :

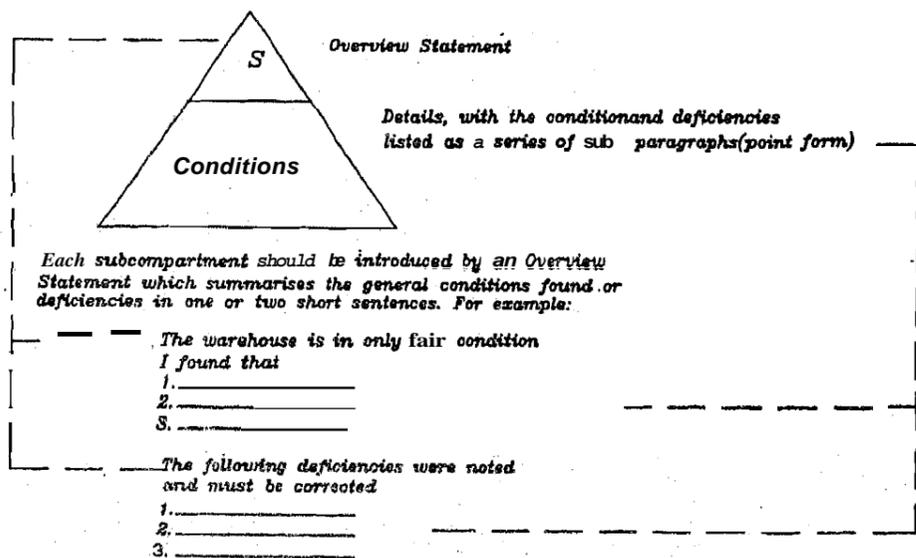


Figure 3.6: Organisation of the *Conditions Found* and *Deficiencies Subcompartments*

- The **Outcome** compartment suggests what should be done as a result of the inspection. If deficiencies **have** been listed at the end of the previous compartment, the **outcome** is likely to be short. For example :

Provided that the deficiencies I **have** listed are corrected, the warehouse **should make** a suitable storage facility for the **Passant** Project.

A form for recording inspection information is shown below, The person carrying out an inspection makes brief notes of the conditions and deficiencies directly onto the form while on site and then later transcribes the information into a **written** report. **Alternatively**, and particularly for short reports, the form can be used as the **final** reporting document.

INSPECTION REPORT

Location: _____ Date: _____

Item(s) being inspected:

Inspector: _____ Contractor: _____

CONDITIONS FOUND :

DEFICIENCIES :

RECOMMENDATION(S) :

Form for an Inspection Report

3.7 PROGRESS REPORTS AND SHORT INVESTIGATION REPORTS

These informal reports are also short, seldom exceeding three pages plus attachments. Their writing compartments, however, are often expanded to include more subdivisions, particularly in the **Facts & Events** compartment of the basic pyramid.

When a report contains detailed information, such as lists of materials, cost analyses, schedules, or drawings, they are normally removed from the body of the report (from the **Facts & Events** compartment) and placed at the back, where they are referred to as "Attachments" or "Appendices." (This is done to avoid cluttering the report narrative with tabular data and thus interrupting reading continuity.) Because they provide supportive evidence, or "**backup**", for statements made in the report, a separate compartment is created for them at the foot of the report writers' pyramid. This compartment is labeled **Backup** and is shown with a dotted line in the figure below indicated that it is optional.

3.7.1 Progress Reports

Progress reports keep management informed of work progress on projects that span a lengthy period, which can vary from a few weeks for a small manufacturing contract to several years for construction of a hydroelectric power station and transmission system.

There are two types of progress reports :

- Occasional progress reports are written at random intervals and usually concern shorter-length projects.
- Periodic progress reports are written at regular intervals (usually weekly, biweekly, or monthly), and concern projects spanning several months or years.

The writing compartments are the same for both reports, although there are differences in their application. They evolve from the basic report writing pyramid with two of the compartments relabeled to suit a progress-reporting situation (see figure)

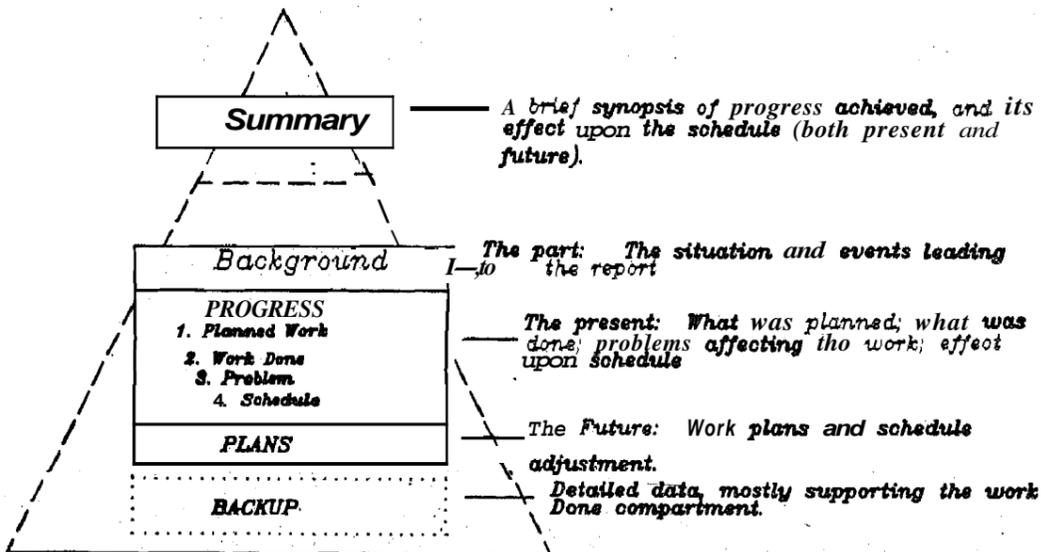


Figure 3.7: Writing Compartments for a Progress Report

- Progress replaces the basic **Facts & Events** compartment and is sub-divided into four smaller compartments, which describe
 - 1) Planned work,
 - 2) Work done,
 - 3) Problems encountered, and
 - 4) Adherence to schedule.
- a **Plans** replaces the original Outcome compartment. There is also an optional **Backup** compartment, for assembling fo— and statistical data pertinent to the project.

3.7.2 Occasional Progress Report

Occasional progress reports apply to short projects during which probably only one progress report will be necessary. Sometimes they are written near the project's midpoint. Occasionally they are written to forewarn management that problems have occurred and delays can be expected. But most often they are written as soon as the project leader has a sufficiently clear picture of work progress to confidently predict a firm project completion date.

Summary

The **summary** should comment briefly on the progress achieved and whether the project is on schedule; it may also predict a project completion date. Its information is drawn from the **Work Done**, **Schedule**, and **Plans** compartments.

Background

If the report will be read only by people familiar with the project, then only minimum background information is necessary. But it will also be circulated to other readers. Then the **Background** compartment should describe briefly the people involved in the project, and the location and dates (i.e. it should answer the questions *Who?*, *Where?*, *Why?*, and *When?*)

Progress

The progress compartment contains information from the four sub-compartments illustrated in figure, which are normally arranged in the order shown (although it is not uncommon for some of these sub-compartments to overlap or be omitted).

- The **Planned Work** sub-compartment outlines what work should have been completed by the reporting date. Normally only a brief statement, it can refer to an attached schedule or work plan.
- The **Work Done** sub-compartment describes how much work has been completed. Only brief comments are necessary for work that has gone smoothly and has progressed as planned. If lengthy numerical data has to be included, it should be placed in an attachment rather than inserted in the report narrative. More detailed comments should be provided if there have been variances from the work plan. They should explain why the variances were necessary and any unusual action that was taken.
- The **Problems** sub-compartment comprises events or situations that affected the doing of the job (e.g. a blizzard that stopped work for two days, late delivery of essential parts, or a strike that prevented access to necessary data). These problems should be described in detail, and the explanation should include what action was taken to overcome each problem and how successful the action was.

The **Schedule** sub-compartment states whether the project is ahead of, on, or behind schedule. If ahead of or behind schedule, the difference should be quoted in hours, days, or weeks.

Plans

This usually short compartment describes the report writer's plans and expectations for the remainder of the project. It should indicate whether the project will finish on schedule and, if not, predict a revised completion date. There should be an obvious link between this compartment and the previous subcompartments (**Schedule**).

Backup

The optional **Backup** compartment contains data such as drawings, statistics, specifications, and results of tests, which if included with the earlier parts of the report would tend to clutter the report narrative. This supporting information is grouped and placed in attachments. Each attachment must be referred to in the **Background** or **Progress** section of the report, so that the reader will know it is there.

3.7.3 Periodic Progress Report

The compartments for a periodic progress report contain similar information to those for an occasional progress report, but there is some shift in content and emphasis.

The format of a periodic progress report also appears to be more rigid than that of an occasional report. This rigidity is imposed not so much by established rules as by the

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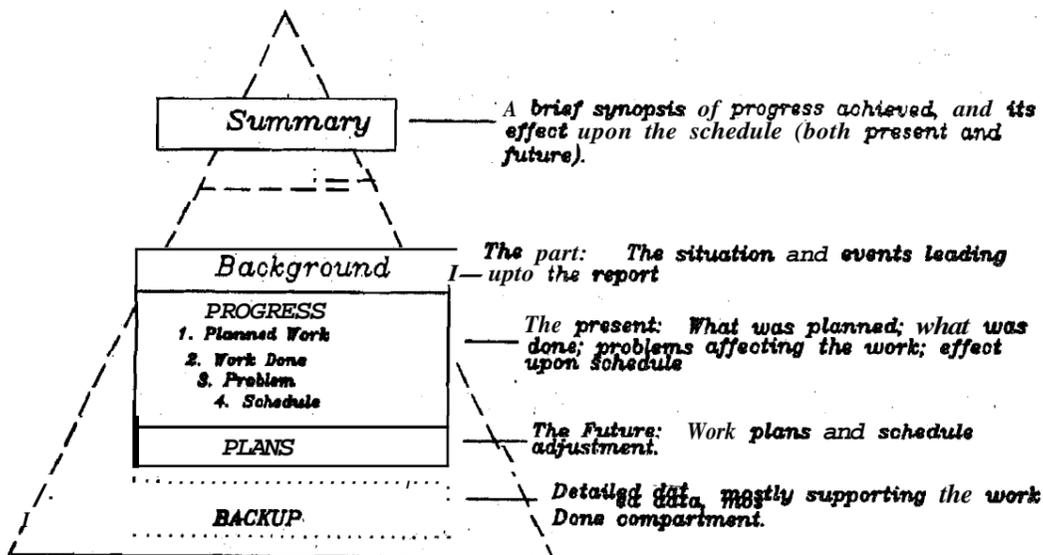


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content and shape of the initial report in a series. The implication is important : report writers should take great care in planning a progress report which is to be the first of a series because they will be expected to conform to the same shape in successive reports.

Summary

The summary should comment briefly on the work accomplished during the reporting period. It may also mention whether the project is on schedule. This information can be drawn from the **Work Done** and **Schedule** compartments.

Background

Except for the first report in a series, which will be fairly detailed, the Background compartment probably will refer only to

- The project number or identification code,
- The dates encompassing the specific reporting period, and

The situation at the end of the previous reporting period, with particular reference to the project's position relative to the established schedule.

Progress

The progress compartment is divided into four sub-compartments. In short reports these sub-compartments may interlock or overlap, but in longer reports they are more likely to be independent units. If there is no information for a particular compartment, then the compartment is omitted.

- 1) The **Planned Work** sub-compartment outlines what should have been accomplished during the reporting period. It may refer to either the original schedule or a revised schedule defined in a previous progress report. Normally it is short, sometimes it is combined with **Work Done**, and occasionally it can be omitted.
- 2) The **Work Done** sub-compartment describes what has been achieved during the reporting period. Ideally, this sub-compartment will
 - Open with a brief overview statement that sums up in general terms what has been accomplished,
 - Continue with a series of subparagraphs each describing in more detail what has been done on a specific aspect of the project,
 - Refer to attachments containing comprehensive numerical data, statistics, or tables (see the **Backup** compartment, below), and
 - Explain variations from the planned work, or unusual activities affecting work progress (this may be linked with the **problems** sub-compartment).
- 3) Problems are factors that have caused changes in plans or in the schedule. The report should describe what action has been taken to overcome the problems, whether the action was successful, if the problems still exist, and what action will continue to be taken, either to avert the problems or to make up lost project time.
- 4) The **Schedule** sub-compartment states whether the project was ahead of, on, or behind schedule on the last day of the reporting period. (There may be a convenient link between this compartment and the end of the previous compartment.) If ahead of or behind schedule, it should state the number of hours, days, or weeks involved. It may also predict when the project will be back on schedule, and recommend a revised schedule for the next reporting period.

Plans

This compartment is very short if the project is running smoothly and is on schedule. But if there are problems affecting the work, it should outline the report writer's expectations for the next reporting period, or even suggest a revised schedule for the whole project.

This optional compartment is used to store detailed information such as forms containing weekly summaries of work done, tests, and inspections.

3.7.4 Short Investigation Reports

Most investigation reports are longer reports that **examine** a problem or situation, identify its cause, **suggest** corrective measures or ways to improve the situation, evaluate the feasibility of each, and select which is most suitable. There are occasions, however, when only a **minor** or local problem is examined and only a short, **informal** investigation report is needed to describe it. Such reports are described here.

The short investigation report has the four basic compartments plus the optional Backup compartment. These compartments are illustrated in Figure 3.8 and outlined in more detail below.

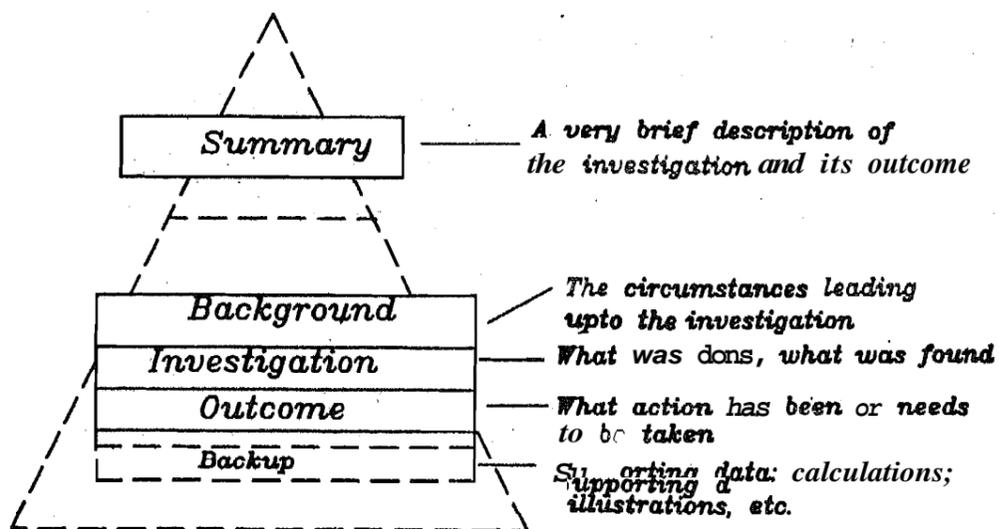


Figure 3.8: Writing Compartments for a Short Investigation Report

- A **Summary Statement** briefly identifies the problem and how it was or can be resolved.
- A **Background** compartment outlines what caused an investigation to be carried out.
- The **Investigation** compartment describes the steps taken to establish the cause of the problem and find a remedy.
- The **Outcome** compartment describes what has been done to resolve the problem or, if other people have to take the necessary action, recommends what should be done.
- The optional **Backup** compartment stores detailed supporting data evolving from the previous three compartments.

3.8 FEASIBILITY REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION REPORT

Probably the most **common** kind of report in technical writing is the feasibility report in which the writer investigates a course of action and explains whether it is possible and practical. **This kind of report** invariably requires a compare - and - context --

- a Part by part

In the whole by whole structure the first item is discussed, then the second, and so on:

Item 1

Aspect A

Aspect B

Aspect C

Item 2

Aspect A

Aspect B

Aspect C

Item 3

Aspect A

Aspect B

Aspect C

The **Whole-by-whole** structure is easy to read and understand because it focuses on each item as a separate entity. Therefore, the whole-by-whole structure is effective if you want to focus on each item as a complete unit rather than on individual aspects of different items. For example, you are writing a feasibility report on purchasing an expensive piece of laboratory equipment. You have narrowed your choice to three different models, each of which fulfills your basic criteria. Each model has its advantages and disadvantages. Because your **organisation's** decision on which model to buy will **depend** on an overall assessment rather than on any single aspect of the three models, you choose the whole-by-whole structure. This pattern gives your readers a good overview of the different models.

If you are using the **more-important-to-less important pattern**, you will discuss the **recommended** model first. If you are using the **problem-methods-solution pattern**, you will discuss the **recommended** model last.

In the part-by-part structure, each aspect is discussed separately :

Aspect A

Item 1

Item 2

Item 3

Aspect B

Item 1

Item 2

Item 3

Aspect C

Item 1

Item 2

Item 3

The part-by part structure **lets** you focus on an individual aspects of the different items. Detailed comparisons and contrasts are more effective in **the** part-by-part structure. For example, you are **comparing and contrasting** the **three** pieces of laboratory equipment. **The** one factor **that** distinguishes the three models is **reliability** : one model has a **much** better reliability record than the other **two**. The part-by-part structure lets you create a section on reliability to highlight this aspect. Comparing **and** contrasting the three models in one place in the document rather **than** in three places makes **your** point more **emphatic**. You sacrifice a coherent overview of the different **items** for a clear, forceful comparison and contrast of an aspect of the **three** models.

As **with** the whole-by-whole pattern, your overall pattern of **development** -- such as more **important-to-less-important** or problem **methods** solution -- will **determine** which aspect you treat first.

SAQ 3

On what **occasions** are **the following written?**

i) **Trip Reports**

I) Inspection Reports

iii) **Progress Feasibility Reports**

SAQ 4

Make a pyramid for a Periodic Progress Report.

SAQ 5

What is the function of a Progress Report ?

3.9 PROPOSALS

Most projects undertaken by **organisations**, as well as most changes made within organisations begin with proposals. When one **organisation** purchases goods or services from another, the decision to purchase is usually based on the supplies *external proposal*. When an employee suggests to her supervisor that the organization purchase a new intercom system or restructure a department a similar but less elaborate *internal proposal* is used.

3.9.1 The External Proposal

External proposals are generally classified as either solicited or unsolicited.

A Solicited proposal is written in response to a request from a potential customer.

An unsolicited proposal has not been requested; rather it originates with the potential supplies. However, proposals are expensive to write and suppliers are reluctant to submit them without some assurance that the potential customer will study them carefully.

3.9.2 The Element of Persuasion

The key to proposal writing is persuasion. The writers must convince the readers that the future benefits will outweigh the immediate and projected costs. External proposal writers must demonstrate that they

- Understand the readers' needs
- Are able to fulfill their own promises
- Are willing to fulfill their own promises

Understanding the readers needs :

- If you are writing a solicited proposal, study the potential events requirements. If there is any aspect of the client's requirements **that you are** not clear about, get in touch with the **client**. Your first job as a proposal writer is to demonstrate your grasp of the problem.
- If you are writing an unsolicited proposal, analyse your audience carefully. Define the problem or opportunity so that your reader will understand **it**. Keep the readers, possible needs in mind and if possible the readers, **background**. Concentrate on how the problem has decreased productivity or quality and how your ideas would create new opportunities. You must convince **your** readers **that** a need exists.

Describing what you plan to do:

Try to convince your readers that you can respond to the situation you have described. Discuss your approach to the subject: indicate the procedures and equipment you would use. Create a complete picture of how you would get from the first day of the project to the last. A full discussion of your plan suggests to your readers that you are interested in the project itself, and not just in winning the contract.

3.9.3 Demonstrating Professionalism

The next step is to demonstrate that you are the kind of person – or yours is the kind of organisation – that will **deliver what** is promised. You should convince your readers that you have the pride, **ingenuity** and perseverance to solve the problems that inevitably occur **in** any big undertaking.

A major element of professionalism is the work schedule (also called task **schedule**). **This** schedule – usually in the form of a chart or graph – shows when the various phases of the project will be carried out. Related to the task **schedule** is some system of quality control, since your readers would want to see that **you** have established procedures to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of your work on the project. Most proposals conclude with a budget – a formal statement of how much the project will cost.

Most proposals follow a basic structural pattern. If the authorizing agency provides a set of guidelines, follow it meticulously. If guidelines have not been supplied use the following structure to write a clear and persuasive proposal :

- 1) Summary
- 2) Introduction
- 3) Proposed Program
- 4) Qualifications and experiences
- 5) Budget
- 6) Appendices

It is very often the case with technical documents the sequence of composition is not the same as the sequence of presentation. The first section to be written is the proposed program. After this proceed to third. The Qualifications and experience, appendices and finally the budget. Thereafter write the introduction summary.

The Summary

The summary is crucial because in many cases it will be the only item the readers study in their initial review of the proposal. The summary should be about 250 words and typed single spaced.

The summary covers the major elements of the proposal but devotes only a few sentences to each. To write an effective summary, first define the problem in a sentence or two. Next describe the proposed program. Then provide a brief statement of your qualifications and experience. Some organisations wish to see the completion date and the final budget figure in the summary, others prefer that these be displayed in a separate location on the title page along with other identifying information about the supplier and the proposed project,

Introduction

The body of the proposal begins with an introduction. Its function is to define the background and the problem. While discussing the problem be as specific as possible. Whenever you can quantify the problem describe it in monetary terms to be able to convince your readers that spending money on what you propose represents a wise investment.

Proposed Program

Once you have defined the problem or opportunity you have to say what you are going to do about it. Every word you say – or don't say – will give your readers evidence to use their decisions.

Qualifications and Experience

Unless you can convince your readers that you have the expertise to turn an idea into action, your proposal will be interesting – but not persuasive.

The more elaborate the proposal, the more detailed the discussion of qualification and experience has to be. For large projects, the resumes of the projects leader – often called the principal investigator and other important participants should be included.

External proposals should also include a discussion of the qualifications of the supplies organisation. Essentially similar to a discussion of personnel, this section outlines the pertinent projects the supplier has completed successfully. It may also focus on the necessary equipment and facilities the company already possesses, as well as the management structure that will assume successful completion of the project.

Budget

Good ideas have little value unless they are affordable

Budgets vary greatly in scope and format. Most budgets can be divided into two parts.

Direct Costs - Salaries and fringe benefits

Travel costs, equipment, materials, supplies

Indirect Costs - Utilities and maintenance cost, general clerical expenses.

Indirect costs are generally expressed as a percentage of direct costs.

Appendices :

These could include : details of other projects, testimonial to the suppliers **skill** and integrity, task schedule and evaluation description.

The task schedule may be drawn in a suitable graphical format.

The Internal Proposal

This is a memo – a persuasive argument submitted within an organisation, for carrying out activity that will benefit the organisation. The nature of the suggestion would determine the format of an **internal** proposal. Proposals involving big expenditure would be submitted in a format similar to the external proposal.

SAQ 6

Name two main categories of Proposals.

3.10 PROJECT REPORT

A Project report is generally the culmination of a substantial research project, **Two** other reports often **precede** it. A **proposal** argues that the writer or writers be allowed to begin and carry out a project. A progress report describes the status of a project that is not yet completed; its purpose is to inform the sponsors of the project how the work is proceeding. The completion report, written when the work is **finished**, provides a permanent record of the entire project, including the circumstances that led to its **beginning**.

3.10.1 Function of the Project Report

A Project report has two basic **functions**. The first is immediate documentation. For the sponsors of the **project**, the **report** provides the necessary facts and **figures**, linked by narrative discussion, which enable them to understand how the project was carried out, what it found, and, most important, what those findings mean. All completion **reports** lead, at least, to a discussion of result. Many completion reports call for the writer to go beyond the result and analyze the results and present conclusions. And finally, many completion reports go one step further and present recommendations : suggestions about how to proceed in the light of the **conclusions**. The second basic function of the completion report is to serve as a future reference. Three common situations send employees searching report\$.

A Project Report is written about a project that **involved** substantial empirical research, whether it was carried out in a lab or **in** the field. Empirical research lies at **the heart** of the scientific method: you **begin with** a hypothesis, conduct experiments to test it, record your results, and determine whether your hypothesis was correct as **it** stands or needs to be modified. The key to empirical research is that you conduct tests and generate original research.

3.10.2 The Structure of the Project Report

Like proposals and progress reports, completion reports must be self-sufficient: that is, they have to make sense without the authors there to explain them. The difficulty for you as a writer is that you can never be sure when your report will be read – or by whom. All you can be sure of is that some of your readers may be managers who are not technically competent in your field and who need only an overview of the project, and that others will be technical personnel who *are* competent in your field and who need detailed information.

To accommodate **these** two basic types of readers, completion reports today generally contain an executive summary that precedes the body (the full discussion). These two elements overlap but remain independent; each has its **own** beginning, middle, and end. Most readers will be interested in one of the two, but probably not in both. As a formal report, the typical project report will contain other standard elements :

- title page
- abstract
- table of contents
- list of illustrations
- executive summary
- o glossary
- o list of symbols
- body
- appendix

This chapter will concentrate on the body of a project report; the other elements common to most formal reports as have been discussed in earlier units.

3.10.3 The Body of the Completion Report

The body of a typical completion report contains the following five elements :

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Methods
- 3) Results
- 4) Conclusions
- 5) **Recommendations**

Some writers like to draft these elements in the order in which they will be presented. Other writers prefer to put off the introductions until they have completed the other elements of the body. In either case, careful brainstorming and outlining are necessary before you begin to write,

The Introduction

The first section of the **detailed** discussion is the **introduction**, which enables the readers to understand the technical discussion that follows. Usually, **the** introduction contains **most** or all of **the** following elements :

- 1) An example of the problem **or** opportunity that led to the project. What was not working, or not working well, **in** the organisation? What improvements in the operation of the **organisation** could be considered if more **information** were known? It might be useful or even necessary here to include a few paragraphs of background to orient the readers.

- 2) A statement of the purpose of the project. What exactly was the project intended to accomplish? What information was it intended to gather or create, or what action was it intended to facilitate?
- 3) A statement of the scope of project. What aspects of the problem or opportunity were included in the project and what aspects excluded? For example, a report on new microcomputers might be limited to those that cost less than \$4,000, or those that have at least 512K of memory. Another approach to defining the scope would be to explain briefly the major technical tasks you had to perform.
- 4) An explanation of the organisation of the report. Readers understand better if they know where you are going and why. Explain your organisation pattern so that readers are not surprised or puzzled.
- 5) A review of the relevant literature will be internal – reports and memos produced within the organisation. Sometimes the literature will be external – published articles or even books that help your readers understand the context of your work.

The Methods

In the methods sections of the report, you describe the technical tasks or procedures you performed. If you are reporting on a physical research project carried out in the lab or the field, this section will closely resemble the discussion section of a traditional lab report. If several research methods were available to you, begin by describing why you chose the method(s) you did. Either list the equipment and materials you used before the description of the research or mention them within the description itself.

Describe what you did: physical experiments, theoretical studies, site visits, interviews, library research, and so forth. Your goal is to show your readers that you have conducted your research in a thorough, professional manner. This will increase not only your readers' ability to understand the findings that follow but also your credibility.

The Results

The results are the data you observed, discovered, or created. You should present the results objectively, so that the readers can "experience" the methods just as you did. Save the interpretation of the results – the conclusion – for later. If you intermix results and conclusions, your readers might be unable to follow your reasoning process. Consequently, they will not be able to tell whether your conclusions are justified by the evidence – the results.

Just as the methods section answers the question, "What did you do?" The results section answers the question, "What did you see?"

The nature of the project will help you decide how to structure the results. For physical-research reports, you can often present the results as a brief series of paragraphs and graphic aids. If in the methods section you described a series of tests, in the results section you simply report the data in the same sequence you used for the methods.

The Conclusions

The conclusions are implications – the "meaning" of the results. Drawing valid conclusions from results requires great care. You should examine all the relevant information and avoid drawing hasty conclusions.

Just as the results section answers the question "what did you see?" the conclusion section answers the question, "what does it mean?"

Recommendations are statements of action. They answer the question "what should we do now?"

The recommendations section is always placed at the end of the body; because of its importance; however, the recommendations section is often summarized – or inserted verbatim – after the executive summary.

METHODS	RESULTS	CONCLUSIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
What did you do?	→ What did you see?	→ What does it mean?	→ What should we do?

If the conclusion of the report leads to more than one recommendation, use a numbered list. If the report leads to only one recommendation, use traditional paragraphs.

Of more importance than the form of the recommendations section are its content and tone. Remember that when you tell your readers what you think they ought to do next, you must be clear, complete, and polite. If the project you are describing has been unsuccessful, don't simply recommend that your readers "try some other alternative". Be specific "what other alternative do you recommend and why?"

3.11 SUMMARY

We generally follow a standard format for report writing. Organisations may sometimes have their format preferences which a professional should be aware of.

The Report Writer's Pyramid helps to emphasise the most important information by bringing it up front.

Some of the more important types of reports are

- Trip Reports
- Incident Reports
- Inspection Reports
- Progress Reports
- Feasibility Reports
- Project Reports
- The key element in Proposals is that of persuasion.

3.12 ANSWERS TO SAQs

Read the Unit carefully to find the answers.