UNIT 1 MECHANICS OF REPORT WRITING

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

- To know what a report is
- Importance of reports
- Different kinds of reports and their functions
- How to write good and effective reports

1.1 WARM UP

- Have you ever read a report of any company? What is it generally about?
- Have you presented the annual report of your school? What does it consist of?
- Have you ever read a pathological report?
- What according to you is common among all these different kinds of reports

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WHAT IS A REPORT

"A business report is any factual, objective document that serves a business purpose"

Written records are a part of all official work. Actions need to be documented. A report is a formal written document on a particular function or operation carried out at the workplace. A report is a presentation and summation of facts and figures either collated or derived. It is a logical and coherent structuring of information, ideas and concepts. The report is segregated into various sections for better comprehension. Understanding the import of these sections, coupled with logical conjoining of the various parts, results in a well written and presented report. A report becomes the basis for any future action. It also serves as a source of reference for whatever is done in the future related to a particular event or operation. Companies receive a number of reports daily, weekly or monthly (depending on need) such as sales reports, production reports and finance reports for making various organisational decisions. Reports can also be delivered orally, such as Annual Reports at Company Meetings or Project Reports in a presentation format to colleagues or superiors.

FEATURES OF A REPORT

A report is characterized by the following features:

1) A report is a detailed explanation of desired information
2) It is written in a defined order so that the reader can understand it fully.
3) It is based on objective facts. It ignores personal bias of the report writer as report forms the basis of decision – making.
4) It is written for a specific purpose
5) It contains conclusions, recommendations and suggestions that facilitate decision- making.

IMPORTANCE/PURPOSE OF REPORTS

Reports are an important component of the business world. An effective report can enhance the future prospects of any company and a poorly written report can mar the future prospects of a company. Problem – solving and decision- making in a company are largely dependent on reports prepared by different departments and people of the organization.

Reports help and serve the following important purposes:

1) Monitor and control operations
2) Implement policies and procedures
3) Comply with government regulations
4) Documenting progress

5) Analyze information and take decisions
6) To obtain new business and diversify
7) Maintain contact with stakeholders

1.2 READING I

Check Your Progress 1

Read the passage given above and answer the following questions:

1) What is a business report?
2) List at least two important features of a good report.
3) What are some of the purposes of writing reports?
4) How do reports help a company to progress?

TYPES OF REPORTS

Basically there are two types of reports

1) Informational Reports
2) Analytical reports

Informational reports present data and facts without analysis or recommendations. These reports are an end in themselves. Progress reports, final reports, sales reports, interim reports are some of the different kinds of informational reports that we come across in the corporate world.

Analytical reports on the other hand are investigative and provide data for analysis and decision making. They contain interpretations, conclusions and recommendations. They give solutions to problems and suggestions on improving the issue at hand.

Informational and Analytical reports can be further categorized into

a) Voluntary and Authorized reports: Voluntary reports are prepared at the initiative of an individual whereas Authorized reports are written at the request of someone else.

b) Routine and Special reports: Weekly, monthly or annual reports submitted to departmental heads are Routine reports as are Confidential reports and Sales reports. On the other hand, reports written for special events or for a specific reason are called Special reports.

c) Internal and External reports: Internal reports as the name suggests are used within an organization whereas External reports are sent outside the organization used by people outside the organization.

d) Formal and Informal reports: Formal reports are prepared according to fixed procedures and norms. On the other hand Informal reports can be prepared by individuals giving relevant information but do not follow any prescribed format.

1.3 READING II

Check Your Progress 2

Given below is a table. Complete the tables by filling in the desired information after

You have read the passage on types of reports.

Type of Report	Characteristics

As reports are written after an action is taken (ATR stands for Action Taken Report) or an operation executed or the occurrence of an event, they are mainly written in the past tense.

The audience, that is, the people to whom we are writing, decides the kind of format that we use for writing a report.

- Is it addressed to
  - a superior within the organisation,
  - a small circle of colleagues,
  - or people in the field outside the organization?

Is it confidential in nature or for public information?

The answers to these and other questions will determine the kind of format we use for a report.

Reports may be several pages in length or just a single page.. They may be in the form of short memos, or letters or lengthy booklets. Government reports on important issues may be published in bound volumes. The language of reports is generally formal, but needs to be simple and clear as it involves the transmission of information that will be used by others.

FEATURES OF WRITING A GOOD REPORT

Clarity: A good report must have clarity in terms of structure and facts and indicate a definite purpose.

Preciseness: must contain relevant issues and be direct and to the point.

Accuracy: must give accurate information and data so that correct decisions can be taken.

Simple: language of a report should be simple so that it is easily comprehensible.

Objectivity: Report should be unbiased and free from personal prejudices and likes and dislikes and should not use personal pronouns like ' I' or 'You' in the report.

Complete: a report should be complete in terms of findings and recommendations to help the person take a correct decision.

DIFFERENT STAGES OF WRITING A REPORT

1) **Defining the problem**: One needs to first make the problem statement in an unambiguous manner. Only then is it possible to work towards a resolution of the problem. Identify the problem, and then proceed towards finding a solution to it. Try to limit the scope of the study and focus on relevant and factual information concerning the problem.

   Outline issues that require investigations and research, and look and analyze all viable possibilities and reasons for the problem.

2) **Developing the statement of purpose:** Once the problem has been identified the next step is to define the objective of the report. For e.g. if the problem identified is absenteeism of workers in an organization due to lack of incentives to workers' then the statement of purpose becomes 'to improve or increase incentives to workers to encourage regular attendance in the organization'.

3) **Preparing the Work Plan:** Now that the problem has been identified and the purpose defined the next step is to work out a plan to achieve the defined purpose. A work plan identifies the various tasks or steps one has to undertake to achieve the defined purpose. The work plan has to be carefully planned and laid down. The work plan defines the

objective of the report and the boundaries within which the work will be undertaken. Matters which will be taken up and matters which will not be discussed. It will also give a detailed outline of the tasks to be taken up as well as the sequence in which they will be taken up, the restrictions if any while conducting the tasks and any other matter concerning the task on hand.

4) **Collecting, Analyzing and Interpreting Data:** Once the work plan has been finalised the next step is collection of necessary data and information, analysis and interpretation to facilitate the writing of the report. After this conclusions are drawn up based on the findings and appropriate recommendations for action are made.

1.4 WRITING I

Check Your Progress 3

You work for a company manufacturing shampoos. The company wants to introduce a new brand of shampoo. You have to go out and find out about:

1. Available brands
2. Price range
3. Kinds of packaging
4. Volume-sizes available
5. Customer Preferences
6. Customer dissatisfaction with existing brands

Collect the information required. How will you do this? You can make use of the next table.

Available Brands	Price Range	Packaging	Volume-sizes available	Customer Preferences

On the basis of the information you collected, you will then have to write a report. You could prepare a table like the one above to show the details of the available brands.

The report can have the following parts:

Introduction:

Statement of Objective:

Sample selection and mode of data collection:

Observations:

Recommendations based on the observations:

Language focus:

The following facts need to be kept in mind while writing reports:

1) The tone should be objective and neutral,
2) Only facts are to be stated,
3) No personal opinion to be reflected,
4) All points should be relevant to the topic,
5) All points should be of significance to readers,
6) Points should be concise and to the point,
7) Reported speech should be used,
8) Past tense should be used

To make a report more effective and coherent one should take the help of visual aids to represent some parts of the report. Doing this breaks the monotony of words and makes the report more interesting . One can use a variety of visual aids like

- Tables
- Bar Graphs
- Pie- Charts
- Line Graphs
- Pictograms/ Pictorial graph
- Flow Charts and Organization Charts
- Drawings, diagrams and maps

1.5 GRAMMAR: USING THE PASSIVE

We use the passive in English if we don't want to draw attention to the person who is responsible for a particular action or process. Indeed the passive is very useful when we want to emphasize the object to which the action or process is happening rather than the person carrying out the action. We can therefore conclude that the passive is used in English to focus on the action.

Check Your Progress 4

Rewrite these Active sentences in the passive form:

1) The suppliers will make further modifications to this service to other customers.

2) Ordinary office staff can easily operate the systems.

3) You can master the new software easily in a couple of days.

4) Using better trained staff has achieved increased productivity.

5) The department now sends out notices a week earlier.

6) You can achieve better results if you work harder.

7) The customer should receive the delivery by Monday.

8) We will produce the spare parts at our Chennai factory

9) We would reduce costs if we used less paper.

10) The clerk finally found the letter in the almirah.

1.6 LISTENING AND SPEAKING

Listen to the recording of the conversation between two colleagues in an office. After you have finished listening to it , summarize out loud briefly in a couple of sentences the conversation you have just heard. Do remember that there is no one best version of the summary.

Tape script:

Saif: What's the matter with Ruma these days?

Reena: Why do you ask?

Saif: Well, she wasn't present at the meeting yesterday considering we all had orders to be present for it.

Reena: Yes , you are right. Do you think she is planning to leave the job?

Saif: Well she did mention to me that her fiancé is planning to move to another city .

Reena: So what? She should not take such a hasty decision.

Saif: True, but I did see her looking up the 'Situations Vacant' page a couple of days back during the lunch break.

1.7 WRITING II

You participated in a torch procession protesting against the rise of petrol price so frequently in the recent months. Write a report of the event. You may talk about the people who participated, some of their views on this issue, its impact on the common man and solutions to this problem.

1.8 PUNCTUATION

Check Your Progress 5

Read the following text. Decide where to add punctuation and to start new paragraphs. You'll also need to add some Capital Letters.

To departmental manager from human resources manager date 15 september subject overseas trainee placement scheme as requested i enclose a copy of the scheduled programme for the trainee initiation week it will be held from 23 october to 27 october following your secretarys telephone call i have set aside a session for you to speak to the participants i have scheduled this for Monday 23 october at 3 00 pm i would be grateful if you would confirm this in addition i would also appreciate receiving any comments you may have on the programme by Friday of this week if possible.

1.9 VOCABULARY

Check Your Progress 6

Here are some questions and answers about a business trip. Complete the questions using words from the list below. Then match each question to the correct reply.

Was, Did, When, How, What, Which.

1)	------- did you go ?	a)	The Sheraton
2)	-------- long did you stay?	b)	On Thursday
3)	------ airline did you fly with?	c)	A week.
4)	----- hotel did you stay in?	d)	Air India
5)	----- you make any useful contacts?	e)	Yes, it was very useful.
6)	------ the trip a success?	f)	Yes, a few.

1.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learned:

- What a report is
- Different kinds of reports
- How to write a good report

1.11 ANSWER KEY

Check Your Progress 1 (Reading I)

1) A business report is a factual, objective document that serves a business purpose.

2) It should be written in a defined order, have objective facts, written with a specific and defined purpose, and must have details of desired information.

3) a) To monitor and control operations.
   b) To implement decisions and policies
   c) To analyze information and take decisions on the basis of this information
   d) To get new business and for diversification of the company

4) An effective report enhances the future prospects of a company. Decisions taken by the company and solutions to problems are generally guided by good reports.

Check your progress 2 (Reading II)

Name of Report	Characteristics
Informational reports	Present data and facts without analyzing or recommendations
Analytical reports	Provide data for analysis and decision making
Special reports	Written for specific event or specific purpose
Internal reports	Used within the organization
Formal reports	Prepared according to fixed procedures and norms
Informal reports	Prepared by individuals . Do not follow prescribed format
Voluntary reports	Prepared at the initiative of individuals
Authorized reports	Written at the request of somebody

Check Your Progress 3

Do it yourself

Check Your Progress 4 (Grammar)

1) Further modifications will be made to this service to other customers.
2) The systems can easily be operated by ordinary office staff.
3) The new software can be mastered in a couple of days.
4) Increased productivity has been achieved by using better trained staff.
5) The notices are now sent out a week earlier.
6) Better results can only be achieved if you work harder.
7) The delivery should be received by Monday.
8) The components will be produced at our Chennai factory.
9) Costs would be reduced if less paper was used.
10) The letter was finally found in the almirah.

Check Your Progress 5 (Punctuation)

To: Departmental manager

From: Human Resources Manager

Date 15 September

Subject: Overseas Trainee Placement Scheme

As requested , I enclose a copy of the scheduled programme for the Trainee Initiation Week. It will be held from 23 October to 27 October.

Following your secretary's telephone call, I have set aside a session for you to speak to the participants. I have scheduled this for Monday 23 october at 3 00 pm. I would be grateful if you would confirm this.

In addition, I would also appreciate receiving any comments you may have on the programme by Friday of this week, if possible.

Check Your Progress 6 (Vocabulary)

1) *When* did you go?	a) The Sheraton
2) *how* long did you stay?	b) On Thursday
3) *What*/ *which*- airline did you fly with?	c) A week.
4) –*which/what*- hotel did you stay in?	d) Air India
5) -*did*-you make any useful contacts?	e) Yes, it was very useful.
6) -*was*-the trip a success?	f) Yes, a few.

1) b
2) c
3) d
4) a
5) f
6) e

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