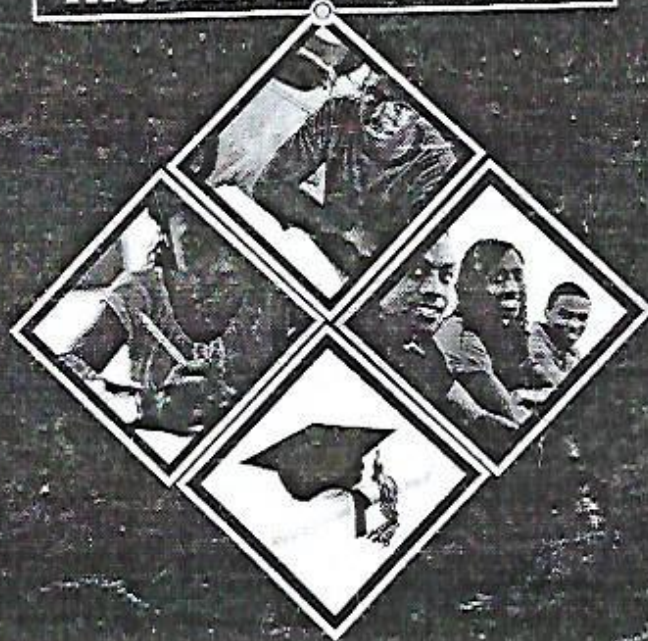


**ESSENTIALS OF COMMUNICATION
SKILLS & TECHNICAL
WRITING FOR
HIGHER EDUCATION**



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REPORT WRITING

BY NGOZI ANIGBOGU AND CHINWE AHUMAREZE

Introduction

A report is a very formal document written for a variety of purposes. Different scholars have defined the term “report” in different ways. Otagburuagu (1995:17) defines a report as ‘a description of an event, an experience, a statement about situations or actions which is meant to give a reliable and accurate piece of information about its subjects and or the event it covers’.

Peter Little (1965:158) sees a report as ‘a document which provides an account of something witnessed or examined, or of an investigation together with conclusions arrived at as a result of the investigation.

Krevolin (1983:39) defines a report as an objective oral or written presentation structured to communicate information, investigate a problem, record ideas and facts, or interpret and or provide solutions to a problem.

Whatever the definition, report writing takes cognizance of particular readership, particular situations and particular relationships between a reader and a writer.

Reports, then, are factual documents which give accounts of events, processes, methods or systems. Some are written to record the methodology, results and conclusions of investigations. Furthermore, reports provide information of objectives. Thus reports can range from a short memo to a lengthy one such as progress reports, health and safety reports, cost-benefit analysis, proposals, research and field reports and so on. Reports can also analyze and evaluate results from experiments in fields or laboratories.

They can outline proposals for a project, report on the progress of a subject, present research and findings from a project. They can detail technical aspects of innovations, present a feasibility or cost benefit analytical study. Also reports can be based on experiences of any event such as experiences at practical sessions, of armed robbery incident, theft etc.

Hence every report has a definite goal to achieve and the final product of a report is a concise, objective, well articulated document presented for assessment.

Types of Reports

Reports are classified into types according to their subject matter or the circumstances in which they are required.

Classification According to Subject Matter

1. **Eye-witness Report:** An eye witness report gives an account of any event or experience. Such an event or experience may range from cases of accidents, thefts, labour unrest, armed robbery, squabbles and so on. This type of report is normally presented in a narrative form and chronological order.
2. **Work Report:** A work report presents information on tasks confronting an establishment or a parastatal. Thus the information provided must be on job related tasks.
3. **Laboratory Report:** This gives an account of the procedure, result and significance of an experiment with findings and conclusion. The writer of a laboratory report focuses solely on the observable facts and reactions that take place in his specimen. It outlines, analyses and, evaluates these facts scientifically to form a report.
4. **Progress Report:** A progress report gives detailed information on the progress made in any establishment: the current tasks undertaken during the past week, month, quarter or year; the progress made; the continuing efforts being made; the projects completed and the problems encountered. Thus this type of report shows that work schedule and time management are meeting set targets and deadlines.
5. **Investigative Report:** The head of any unit, parastatal, establishment may constitute a committee to look into any matter, or issue confronting the unit. After investigation, a report is sent in with detailed information on the matter. This type of report is called an investigative or special report.
6. **Analytical Report:** Analytical reports are necessitated by problems in a set-up or opportunities that have come up in a business set-up. So they persuade readers to accept certain conclusions as being factual and valid.

Reports Classified According to Forms

Since a report is a formal document, it should be presented in a precise, accurate and definite pattern. Thus, the report could be schematic or in a letter form. It may also be in a combination of both the schematic and letter forms.

1. **Schematic Form:** Ideas presented in a report can be arranged into sections and sub-sections. These ideas carry headings and sub-headings along with numbers. The schematic form of a report breaks ideas down for the reader and makes ideas more readable. The headings and sub-headings reflect the main focus of the section or sub-section and also help the reader to notion the structure and the organization of the report.
2. **Letter Form:** A report can also be presented in a letter form. This is, however, only possible where the subject matter being presented is a simple one with a single point of view. The letter form of a report is usually an official letter in outlay.

3. **Mixed Form:** The mixed form of a report combines features of the letter form and feature of the schematic form. It begins like a letter and takes the schematic form when the findings are written down. The writer of this form of report returns to the letter form at the end of the report.

Reports Classified According to Length

Reports are also classified according to length. Hence we have long or detailed reports and short reports. Long reports give detailed information while shorts reports do not contain full details. Here the length depends on the degree of information required.

The Structure of a Report

The structure of a report is flexible. It depends on the type and the form one may be writing. A report, however, has the following structure.

1. **The Report Title:** The report title provides a short but clear idea of the subject matter of the report. It must be accurate and concise.
2. **Summary:** A report may include a brief summary of the content of the report. It is usually brief and informative.
3. **Introduction:** The introduction gives a kind of background of the report. It gives the reader some kind of idea as to the reasons for writing any piece of report. Enough background should be given so that the reader can understand the significance of the report.
4. **The Body:** The body of any report provides the material which the writer presents to support his point of view. The body is divided into sections and subsections, each one marked with suitable heading and subheadings.
5. **Recommendations:** Recommendations proffer suggestions on the issue presented in the report. They give insights on what need to be done to solve the problem being investigated. Again, the recommendation ought to reflect the writer's level of reasoning and sense of judgment.
6. **Conclusion:** Conclusions present the main points arising from the report. This should be given in a conclusive, definite and brief manner.

A longer report, however includes the following:

Title Page

Acknowledgements

Summary

Table of Contents

Introduction/Terms of Reference/Scope

Procedure

Findings

Conclusions

Recommendations

Reference/Bibliography

Appendices

1. **Title Page:** The title page is the first page a long report. It contains the title and author's name, the reports reference number and date.
2. **Acknowledgements:** On this page, the writer expresses his gratitude to those who have contributed and helped him during the course of the work in one way or the other.
3. **Summary:** This sets out main points of the reports from the beginning, middle and end. The end product of the summary is a concise overview of report.
4. **Table of Contents:** This shows the sections and subsections of the report with the pages of the report where each may be found.
5. **Terms of Reference:** This section states the goals and scope of the report.
6. **Procedure:** Under procedure, the report writer states the methodology used in tracking down the problems/getting the data. The procedure may be in the form of interview, questionnaire and other forms of gathering factual information.
7. **Findings:** Under this section of the report, the writer gives authentic discoveries made during the course of the investigation. All the materials collected are interpreted and analyzed.
8. **Conclusion:** This section gives an unbiased judgment of the findings made. Personal opinions are avoided and objective statements are made to prove the authenticity of claims and allegations as the case may be.
9. **Recommendations:** Recommendations demonstrate the writer's sense of judgments'. They are actually meant to precede whatever the discoveries are in the findings.
10. **References:** The books and materials consulted in the course of the work are arranged correctly. Usually this adopts alphabetical arrangements.
11. **Appendices:** The raw data used for the reports are also presented in an appendix. Some other materials such as blank questionnaires, copies of written tests, maps, and charts are included in an appendix. These are basically meant to show the original forms in which certain pieces of information occur.

Proposal Report

A proposal report is significant because it serves the general purpose of introducing a research idea or question. A proposal could be likened to the outline of an essay given that it provides the work plan of how to tackle a research problem stating all activities/steps to be taken in a bid to complete the work with ease. A proposal is thus "a statement of what a researcher hopes to do(objective), how to carry out the research(methodology), when the research will be executed (timescale), where the research will be executed (context), and resource requirement for the study"(Nkemnebe & Ebu, 2009:32).

A research proposal, be it the one written by postgraduate students or the one aimed at attracting grants from funding agencies, follows some laid down principles, otherwise known as formats. However formats may differ as academic discipline abound. Ogum(2009) has identified signposts which are non negotiable in the preparation of a report proposal and they include,

1. Choosing the topic of your research.
2. Preparing the literature review of your research
3. Formulating your methodology and
4. Outlining your analytical tools

A proposal should be prepared in such a way that it is convincing enough to prove that the writer has a worthwhile research project and has the competence and work plan to complete it. It should outline all the main elements involved in the research process. Proposals must address the following

1. Problem—what do you want to accomplish. Identify the research problems to be investigated
2. Significance—why do you want to do it.
3. Methodology—how are you going to do it.

A proposal should include an important research idea, a careful recourse to relevant literature and a robust and sound methodology.

Given the following scenario, a good proposal should serve the following functions:

To outline the purpose and aims of the research

To state the contributions of the proposed work to the body of knowledge

To give the proposed work direction

Format for a Research Proposal

Proposals are written for specific purposes but the format of proposals vary as reporters, academic disciplines and types of research vary. Nonetheless, proposals have the following headings/sections:

Title/Title page

The title of a proposal should be concise and effective. The title of a proposal may change as the work progresses, so it is best to see it as a working title. A proposal should be able to arouse the reader's interest and make him act favourably towards the proposal. Thus, the title should capture all indices to be explored in the work. The title page should bear the following: title, name(s) of author(s), registration number, department, faculty, institutions and affiliations, name of supervisor and date of presentation.

Abstract

This is a summary of the proposal which should contain about 250 words. The abstract is expected to capture the following

Statement of problems

Significance of the Study

Hypothesis (if any)

Methodology. Expected outcome

Introduction

This is also known as the background. This section of the proposal captures what motivated the researcher to write. The introduction sets the proposal in motion for it provides the clear overview of the proposal. The introduction requires skill because it needs to arouse and sustain the interest of the reader. Among other things, the introduction should describe the purpose of the study, the writer's knowledge of the topic as well as how the present research would add to the body of knowledge

Research Questions and Objectives

In every proposal, there is a need to state clearly the research questions and objectives as they indicate what the proposal is all about. This section gives series of questions which will serve as guidelines for the study and the objectives of the study.

Literature Review

In this section, the author is expected to cite and write about previous research on the subject. A general survey of important works and concepts that establish the basis and relevance of the research should be given. This section is very important because it demonstrates the author's knowledge of the research problems and area as well as indicates one's ability in critically evaluating and synthesizing relevant information and work. It is in this section that the author strives to establish holes or gaps in previous researches so as to establish a basis for the present research: what the work will prove or solve. For a proposal, the literature review should be very brief.

Methods

This section of the proposal is very important and should be properly articulated to show how the author intends to achieve his objectives. This section should have the following consideration.

How do you plan to execute your work; is it a questionnaire study or a laboratory experiment

What subject do you plan to study?

Who are your intended population?

What is the size of the population?

How do you intend to bring out the sample of the population - the sampling procedure.

How do you intend to collect data?

What type of measuring instrument do you intend to use in data collection?

What method do you intend to use in administering the chosen instrument?

How would you analyse the data collected?.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this section, preliminary suppositions are discussed. Drawing on the objectives of the study, the proposer should describe how the proposed study will impact future research, policy, pave way for the solution of socio-economic problems as well as expand existing knowledge. In the way of conclusion, the proposer should restate the significance of the proposed work, give a brief summary-purpose, research question, design and method. There should be emphasis on the worth of the proposed study.

References and Resources

There are resources needed in every research, which ranges from access to data, literature, time, finance, equipment and others. The researcher should convince readers that he can easily access these resources so as to finish the research in record time. Again, the author should make a few citations as references need not be much at this period. This should be done in compliance with the referencing style of the reporter's institution.

Research Report

A research report is a systematic, organized, articulate and orderly presentation of a research work in a written format. It entails understanding the result of a research work and organizing it in a specific format. A research report documents and contains the basic aspects of a research project. It is the best medium to communicate research findings to relevant individuals, institutions, and organizations and also document such findings for reference purposes.

A research may be carried out for specific purposes which include; to acquire a degree and to solve a problem. The length of research report may also vary depending on where the need for the research stems from. If the need for the research stems from the desire to solve specific

problems and challenges, the report is usually condensed but if it is carried out in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of a degree, the report is lengthy following laid down principles and format.

Qualities of a good research report

Conciseness.

Clarity.

Competence.

Accuracy.

Objectivity.

Appropriateness in language use (present tense and active voice).

Precision.

Originality

Use of visual aids

Attractive in appearance and layout

Availability of the findings

Ability to solve intellectual problems

For a research report to possess these qualities, the researcher must be knowledgeable, imaginative, creative and experienced.

Format for a research report

The format for a research usually varies depending on the researcher, institution and the need of the reader. The following format is presented because of its flexibility. The research report which this chapter considers is the undergraduate final year's research report otherwise known as thesis or project and the post graduate research report known as dissertation.

A research report is divided into the following sections:

A Formality Part/ Preliminary Pages

This part comprises the following

- I. The cover page
- II. The title page

- III. Certification
- IV. Approval page
- V. Acknowledgements
- VI. Preface/forward
- VII. Table of contents
- VIII. List of tables
- IX. List of figures

Abstract-summary of the work pin pointing the problem, hypothesis, procedure and major findings.

B The Main Text.

This part comprises the following:

1 Introduction

The historical and theoretical framework the study hinges on:

Statement of problem-the central issue or problem the study wants to resolve.

Significance of study—why does the question need investigation

Purpose of study—what is to be gained from the study

Statement of hypothesis/research question-assumptions and questions which help the researcher in investigating and finding solution to the problems.

Assumption—Explain everything assumed in order for the investigation to be taken.

Limitations-explain all that tend to limit the quality and accuracy of your work.

Operational Definition - define and clarify terms/concepts used in the study.

2 Review of Literature

In the review of literature, the researcher does a purposeful search and investigation of documented works relating to the topic. This is done with view to ascertaining what is already known about the problem that underlies the study. While doing this review, the researcher should strive to highlight the similarities and differences between past research efforts and the present one as well as show the gap in knowledge the present research wants to fill .Also ,the researcher critically analyses and evaluates the works done by other authors.

2 Research Methodology/Design and Theoretical Framework

This section explains the theory that underlies the study, the methods the researcher will use to source for data, the instrument for data collection, method for the administration of instrument as well as the research population.

Note the following:

Population-People, events, objects and animals within the target area of the study.

Sample-A portion of the research population.

Sampling Technique-Method used in getting the sample of the population used.

Instrument-means of obtaining data; interviews, questionnaires, experiments and observations.

Method of Data Analysis

The researcher should explain the techniques used to extract from the data information/facts that resolve the problem or provide answers to research problems and hypotheses .The researcher should analyse the data in accordance with relevance to research questions as well as varying number of alternative responses.

4 Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Analyse your data, breaking it into constituent parts. Present your findings, discuss and interpret them in relation to the research problems and the hypotheses. Relate the findings to existing theories.

5 Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations.

The researcher should summarise findings to drive home and simplify the points. He should then conclude by restating the rationale for the study and assessing the extent the problem has been solved. Recommendations should then be made based on and relating to the findings.

C The Subsidiary Pages.

These include;

I Appendixes (questionnaire)

II References/ Works Cited

Uses/Importance of Reports

Since reports basically communicate pieces of information obtained through thorough investigation and research It is a reservoir of reliable information which serves humanity in diverse forms and contributes to the growth and development of the society.

Report provides accurate information on diverse subject matters. Information provided in a report helps institutions, organizations and corporate bodies in planning and effective management. It is useful in equipping any management with correct choice and effective decision making which on the long run translates to effective management and operational competence.

Reports also serve as effective means of communication within organizations. They provide vehicle for the cross flow of information, from management to employees and then feedback from employees to management.

It is also crucial to point out that reports help in solving current organizational and societal problems. Reports do not end without recommendations and guidelines which when applied deals with complicated problems.

Features of a Good Report

Since report writing is essential for effective human communication, it is imperative that they be well written to aid comprehension. Care has to be taken to ensure that these features are taken into account.

Features of a Good Report

1. **Accuracy:** A report must be accurate and factual. This will prove that the report is authentic and well treated.
2. **Logicity and Objectivity:** Facts in report writing must be logical and objective without any room for possible misinterpretation ambiguities and Vagueness. The writer must avoid any form of sentimentality, subjectivity, prejudice and the like. Facts must be presented without any misinterpretation or undue influence from the writer.
3. **Clarity:** A good report must be clear or lucid. The facts presented in the report must be vague or confusing. The writer should select apt words suitable for his subject matter. The information contained in a report should be direct and straight forward and should be able to capture the message intended.
4. **Coherence:** A good report must be coherent. The structure must be perfectly adapted to its subjects and be presented step by step and logically too.

5. **Formality:** A good report should be formal. Thus, formal writing should be employed. This simply means writing in full and avoiding slang or colloquialisms and using words correctly. Formal writing is more ordered and stately.
6. **Brevity:** A good report must not be too long. A writer should not explain the same point more than once, not being sure that the meaning was clear at the first attempt. However, some reports are long because they contain a great deal of important information and the information may be required as in the case of a detailed report.

Study Question

You were in charge of organizing your departmental week as the president of your departmental union. You recorded a lot of progress during the week and encountered a lot of problems too. Write a report on the departmental week stating the progress, problems and recommendations for improvement. Use the schematic form.