**Chapter Ten**

**REPORT WRITING: AN OVERVIEW**

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**Introduction**

It is not very easy to define the report because it comes in so many different sizes and forms. In length, the report ranges from about half a page to about fifty pages or more, depending on the nature and purpose of the report. It may appear as a memo, a standard form, a cyclostyled leaflet or a bound book (with index, appendices, exhibits, etc.). Candlin (1952:203), describes it as “a clear and logical presentation of data intended to place those calling for the report in possession of information necessary for further action”. Kelly (1970:91), describes a report as “a statement of facts presented for the attention of someone seeking information”. it could also be stated that a report is a means of communicating to others the facts about a situation or process; how these facts were arrived at, their significance, the conclusions that may be drawn from them and the recommendations now being made based on the available facts. It performs the functions of a store for the information available. The goal is to present the information in a clear and useable form. The language is precise and the content is factual and objective, containing no guesses.

**Importance of reports**

Reports are of utmost importance in business firms, organizations, institutions, companies or ministries. Only the letter could be said to rival the report as an important widely used organizational document for storing and passing information. Supervisors at the operational level report upward on the activities and attitude of workers. The administrators at the middle management level consolidate, interpret and organize the lower echelon data into reports which they still send higher until finally, the top executive of the firm or organization receives the report which represents compact information and knowledge about the whole organization. Besides this, there are also downward flowing reports which supply lower echelon executives and workers with the information they need for their work. Not only is there vertical reporting, there is horizontal reporting which pools research and insights of the various departments. Apart from the internal reporting, there is external reporting to ‘public’ like government, trade associations, community etc. Thus, modern companies tend to depend more and more on swift, accurate and useful reporting.

1. Not only is this, most communication-minded management, consciously or unconsciously, use report-writing ability as a basic criterion in judging fitness for promotion. Thus, effective report writing is rampant not only in the operation of a business or organization, but also in the advancement of an individual career. The ability to build a clear and useful report favorably spotlights any employee.

*Exercise*

Of what importance is a report to the attainment of organizational goal?

**Types of reports**

Reports may be classified according to method of preparation, the intended focus of interest, purpose, subject matter, format, etc. This has led to overlapping in the listing of the main types of reports. Reports can be delivered orally or in writing; however, the written mode has advantage of being more formal and more permanent. When we classify according to the subject we can identify types like historical, economic or scientific, etc. While the informal type of report gives facts or information without evaluation, comment, or recommendation along with the presented data.

An interim report is written in the course of a project or investigation, to make known the current situation as at the time the report is written, before the completion of the project or investigation. On the other hand, a periodic report is given from time to time at regular or specific intervals.

For our purpose in this text, we shall focus on these types of reports:

\*Progress report

\*Recommendation reports

\*Memorandum reports

\*Technical reports

\*Laboratory reports

\*Minutes of meeting

***(1) Progress Reports***

This type of report is made to assess the achievement of an organization or an individual. It is usually periodic in nature and it is like a diary of events. It can be written at regular intervals either monthly, quarterly, annually or biannually. It summarizes work activities over a period. In some establishments, it is mandatory for progress reports to be written every year on all staff of the establishment. At times, there are specially designed forms to be filled in the writing of this type of report. (See the example below).

Large organizations depend on progress reports to keep track of activities, problems, and progress on various projects. At times, daily progress reports are used in business firms where several work crews are assigned to various projects. Often the management uses progress

reports to evaluate a project and its supervisors, and to allocate funds.

***(ii) Recommendation reports***

These reports are analytical in nature. Here, the investigator is particularly expected to offer recommendations alongside the information he provides. He interprets data, draws conclusion and then he offers appropriate recommendation. This is the case particularly where the investigator is an authority on the subject of the report. At times it may be cast in a letter as in the example below. Note the use of technical language as the reader is expected to be familiar with the terms used. Following a direct plan, the report begins with a brief introduction to the topic, and the purpose of the report. Then it gives its recommendation, overview, and the topics of analysis. Note that the writer’s tone is formal, befitting the relationship between an investment counselor and client.

***(iii) Memoranda***

This is the presentation of report data in a memorandum format.

The memorandum is a vital part of every business, school, government, office or service organization. It is accepted method of communication with other people working in the same organization. It is usually prepared on a standard 8 by 11 inches sheet or a half-sheet, i.e. 8 by 5 inches sheet. Each company or government establishment has its own memorandum form, since it has not been conventionalized as the business letter. Often, guide words are printed on the memorandum sheet to indicate the proper format. In such a case, the typist fills in the blanks which follow each guide word. (See below).

MEMORANDUM

To:

From:

Subject:

Reference:

Date:

…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

...............................................................................

...........................................................................................................................................................

.................................................................

The memorandum is the chief vehicle for written internal communication in business and government establishments. Covering any topic and purpose, it spells out intricate details and supplies a permanent reference form for those who must follow instructions, cutting down on mistakes. It speeds up communication and also preserves them in time as record. With the personalization of business, memorandum reports are used increasingly for shorter reports instead of the formal report form. All memorandum share certain basic qualities:

*Simplicity and Clearness*

Utility rather than convention governs the preparation of these written messages. Although, the language of the memorandum should imply respect of the receiver’s dignity and positions, it is usually free of the longer expressions of courtesy necessary in external communication. The vocabulary of the memorandum should be direct and simple and the sentences should be short and well pointed. ‘Telegraphs’, however, must be avoided.

*Careful Organization*

Every memorandum is a testimony of the writer’s ability to think and do his work. It is therefore, important that the memorandum writer takes pains to compose creditable memorandums.

*Promptness*

All communication must be swift in movement, but the memorandum is designed particularly for speed in preparation, dispatch, and reading. Promptness in answering is also important.

*Adaptation*

Memorandums are usually adapted to the reader’s level of authority and to the subject discussed.

1. Adaptation to level of authority: in downward communication, the executive must gain acceptance, while in the upward communication, the writer must present the ideas in the form which his superior will find acceptable. Always to be avoided are the extremities of humility and over assertiveness.
2. Adaptation to subject matter: While the financial memorandum would be precise, conservatives, thoughtful and serious; that on library facilities might be inspirational. Memorandums give orders, supply information, make request, offer suggestions and build morale. Effectiveness in each of these functions calls for special adaptation. Informant giving memorandums and request memorandums are often horizontal rather than vertical in movement, and must employ some of the techniques of salesmanship and persuasion in gaining support.

Their purpose is to present facts as clearly and as quickly as possible in order to keep day-to-day business activities moving. Sometimes, you can be a little less formal in writing a memorandum than in writing a letter. It depends on how well you know the reader and on your respective business positions. But you should always apply good letter writing principles and be direct, clear, complete and accurate. Make sure the first paragraph convey why the memo is being written. And make sure that each sentence contains only one main thought and conveys the meaning you intend.

The following are few hints which can guide you to write effective memorandums:

1. Whenever possible simple words are preferable to long complicated ones.
2. Use only the necessary words.
3. Avoid being concise at the expense of politeness.
4. Concrete, precise words are preferable to general indefinite ones.
5. Keep your reader in mind and be tactful.
6. Be straightforward in your presentation.
7. While short sentences are preferable to long ones, remember that variety is the ‘spice of life’.
8. Maintain short paragraphs.

***Advantages:***

The memorandum is useful to communicate important ideas which must not be forgotten but which could be forgotten on the telephone, for example. Besides, it cuts down on communication mistakes, and also saves time. The memorandum also serves organizations as reference data or records for re-strategizing, recalling information on previous steps taken on an issue or defending actions.

*Exercise 2*

In a memo to your supervisor, outline your progress to date on your term project. Describe your accomplishments, your plans for further work, and any problems or setbacks. Conclude your memo with a specific completion date.

***(iv) Technical reports***

These are reports which are technical/scientific in nature, in which technical language is used. It contains technical information which has been carefully gathered. Here, is the reporting of technical information using technical terminologies and numbers. It is important to use these technical terminologies or jargons so that when writing a report for the expert in the field, you will meet him at his level. Unlike in most other types of writing, you should here consider the use of diagrams, graphs, drawings, tables and charts to help communicate the message. Also, visuals are often able to explain the concept or idea in less space.

Technical writing is never sloppy. The sentences to be used are usually short and direct unlike the situation with longer informal reports. In this type of report, the passive voice is often appropriate since it allows the writer to appear less visible.

The passive voice gives the receiver of the action more emphasis. For instance, when a report presents a committee or departmental position, it is often better to use the passive voice to avoid making the report sound like a personal opinion of the writer only.

At times, technical reports are written to report experimental works, observation from field works, and feasibility studies. (See the example of a report below).

**REPORT OF GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY FOR THE LOCATION OF WATER BOREHOLE IN CHIEF IBIKUNLE’S COMPOUND, FATE/TANKE ILORIN.**

1. ***Introduction***

**1.1** *Areas of survey***:** They are in the premises of Chief Olasehinde’s house in Fate/Tanke, Ilorin (Fig. 1)

**1.2** *Aim, scope and method***:** The aim of the investigation is to identify a suitable point for the location of water borehole within and around the premises.

The electrical resistivity method using Okurams A/C Resistivity Meter was employed in the study. It involved vertical electrical sounding (VES) technique using schlumberger arrangement. Depth penetration was up to 100m.

To ensure that the probability of contamination of groundwater at the borehole location is reasonably guarded against, physical inspection of the premises and the neighbouring premises was also undertaken.

**1.3 G***eological background***:** The Ilorin metropolis as a whole lies within the basement complex of Nigeria. The basement terrain is characterized by crystalline bedrock comprising mainly gneisses and schists cut by granitoid intrusive. Except for occasional outcrops, the crystalline bedrock occurs beneath an overburden (regolith) of varying thickness. The overburden itself is largely made up of in-situ weathered bedrock capped by a relatively thin soft, earthy surficial deposit of sand-clay top soil and patchily consolidated gravel-sands, all of which are lateralized to varying extents. Where overburden is porous and/or permeable, it usually constitutes a source for groundwater. Even better aquifer potentials can occur beneath the overburden where the bedrock is fissured/ fractured; otherwise the bedrock is an aquiclude.

**2.0 *Investigation***

**2.1** *Inspection:* Physical inspection of the premises revealed that it was not feasible to sound any point within it, given the infrastructural developments already in place viz-a-viz the stationing of mobile rig and location of cesspits. The point eventually selected is S3 (Fig.1) located outside, but close (1.0m) to the fence. Although outside, the geo-electric information from the point should approximate those obtained within the premises. In view of this, the point S4 (fig.1) is recommended.

RIVER

O S3

O S4

O S2

**N**

O SI

**FIG. I SKETCH OF THE STUDY AREA**

**2.2 *Result of V.E.S.: The V.E.S. data for S3 location is given below in (Table 1)***

**TABLE 1: V.E.S. DATA**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Current Electrode  Spacing (m) | S3. App. Res.  P (Ωm) | S3. Cumulative  App. Res. (Ωm) |
| 1 | 115.7 | 115.7 |
| 2 | 158.3 | 274.0 |
| 3 | 179.5 | 453.5 |
| 5 | 156.1 | 609.6 |
| 7 | 103.7 | 713.3 |
| 10 | 70.04 | 783.34 |
| 15 | 50.0 | 833.34 |
| 20 | 37.03 | 893.37 |
| 30 | 23.6 | 893.97 |
| 45 | 28.7 | 922.67 |
| 60 | 36.3 | 958.97 |
| 100 | 55.3 | 1014.27 |

**3.0 Interpretation and Recommendations**

**3.1 *Interpretation:*** The apparent resistivity versus electrode spacing log-log curve (fig.2) clearly portrays a typical three-layer geo-electric section. This consists of upper layer with high and progressively rising resistivity value (115-1805Ωm) as depth increases, followed beneath by an intermediate layer with progressive falling resistivity value (down to about 23Ωm). Beneath the intermediate layer is a third zone with low but progressively rising resistivity values.

A log-log plot of the cumulative apparent resistivity against apparent (fig.3) depth also depicts a three-layer system with intercepts at 3.3 ± 0.5m depth for the upper layer and 9m±1m depth for the base of the intermediate layer. Beneath the intermediate layer there is a gently inclin ing straight line rising to infinity.

This suggests bedrock.

The above features are interpreted as follows:

1. Upper Layer: Relatively dry overburden probably consisting of superficial deposits of top sandy soil and patchy zones of consolidate gravels (Colluvium) beneath which occurs sandy-clay derived from in-situ weathered basement (saprolite) all of which are lateritised (3.3 ± 0.5m thick).
2. Intermediate Layer: This is a water-bearing horizon comprising essentially earthy sand-clay (saprolite) from in-situ weathered basement (bedrock) down to a depth of 9.0 ± 1m from surface (i.e. 3-9m).
3. Lower Zone:Beneath the intermediate layer is the basement. However, the relativity low resistivity values from about 9-30m depth (i.e. top of the bedrock) portrays:
4. A highly conductive fresh bedrock due to iron-rich lithology.
5. A fissured and/or partially weathered zone (saprock), hence the mentioned horizon also has good aquifer potentials.

**Recommendations**

1. Groundwater table should be intercepted at 3-4m depth. Drilling should however continue further down to at least the bedrock: should the prediction of weathered and/or fissured bedrock be correct, drilling could continue to about 30-35m depth. In this case the upper 10m or so can be cased off. This is because the prospects for purer groundwater and richer aquifers generally increase with depth within certain limits. Drilling should be supervised by a competent geologist/hydrogeologist.
2. The following post-drilling works are also recommended.
3. Development of borehole by flushing to ensure clean fresh water.
4. Yield test to ensure proper management (i.e. pumping strategy) for the borehole.
5. Water quality test to ascertain whether or not the quality is within acceptable limits for human consumption.

The borehole water outlet can be linked up with the municipal water supply line into the premises. For this purpose, the advice and service of a competent plumber should be sought. The linkage could be done in such a way as to permit dependent usage of the borehole water whenever desired.

Signed:……………………… Signed …………………………..

**A.B. Joel T. O. Idowu**

Consultant Geologist Geophysicist/Hydrogeologist

*Exercise 3*

a. What do you understand by technical reports?

b. Give five examples of a technical report and briefly describe them.

***(v) Laboratory reports***

These are also technical in nature whether in the medical laboratory or in the purely scientific, experimental laboratory. Usually, with laboratory reports very few words are used. Be sure to outline the aim and the categories under which the various information is listed in order to make the report truly scientific. The aim is usually preceded by a general statement about the subject matter. The aim functions as a pronouncement of the researcher’s intention. It tells one specifically what will be undertaken in the research and the speculated results. On the other hand, hospital laboratory reports are usually given on specially prepared format. (See the example below).

**TITILOPE CLINIC & MATERNITY**

No 20 Federal Road, Ilorin

P.O. Box 3667

Tel: 031-221913

ULTRASOUND REQUEST/REPORT FORM

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SURNAME  Olakunle | FIRST NAME  Olukemi | AGE  43yrs. | SEX  F | CARD.  No  -- | | X-RAY  No  -- |  |
| ADDRESS  No 20 Morolape Street | | | OCCUPATION  Accountant | | | L M P  25/12/2013 | |
| REQUESTING DOCTOR’S  NAME AND SIGN  Dr. Mofolasayo | | CONSULTANT  Dr. Olutola | | | WARD CLINIC  -- | | DATE  20/04/2014 |
| CLINICAL INFORMATION  Slight bleeding PV today  ? Thr. Abortion? Wrong date | | | | | EXAMINATION REQUIRED  Pelvic USS | | |

***Pelvic Scan***

Bulky Uterus with a smooth outline. No uterus mass-lesion in seen.

The endometrical plate is intact but moderately thickened.

Both adnexae are free.

Pod is empty**.**

***Conclusion:*** *?* Perimenopause.

**Signed**

**SONOLOGIST 20/04/2014**

(Back of report)

*MEDICAL INFORMATION ON ULTRASOUND FOR THE DOCTOR*

*(Please Remind Patient to Drink a Lot of Water before Coming for Scan)*

*Ultrasound Scanning is safe at any time in Pregnancy.*

*It is not harmful. REPEAT SCANS even weekly are not harmful. It is not an X-ray.*

*A full bladder is necessary so that the sound waves can penetrate easily to pelvic organs. Therefore the patient should follow the instruction to fill the Bladder.*

*Indications.*

*To determine the presence of pregnancy (from six weeks)*

*To confirm intrauterine pregnancy*

*To confirm viable pregnancy in bleeding in early pregnancy e.g. treated abortion, missed abortion.*

*To diagnose multiple pregnancy*

*To locate the placenta*

*To confirm foetal death*

*To diagnose abnormality in foetal position & uterus*

*To diagnose hydatidiform mole*

*To asses pelvic masses e.g. Ovarian Cysts, fibroids*

*To asses general wellbeing of pregnancy routinely at 16-20 weeks*

*A SCAN Before 20 weeks is most accurate for calculating L.M.P in paternity disputes and gestational age assessment.*

*Although the sex of a baby may be incidentally determined, it should not be a primary indication for Scan.*

*Ultrasound cannot asses the pelvis*

*Ultrasound can be used to assess liver, kidney, breast, abdominal disease, especially masses.*

*Ultrasound is very useful in evaluating hydrocephalus in Babies and Children with open frontanelles.*

*Ultrasound can evaluate some eye and retro ocular lesions*

*THANK YOU.*

***(vi) Minutes of a meeting***

Meetings are held to determine action, to formulate policy or to make decisions. This being so, it is essential that the business of the meeting be truthfully and accurately recorded. This is the function of minutes. Minutes are a form of report following fairly standard conventions. They are the official record of organizational and committee meetings. Copies are distributed to all members and concerned supervisors as a way of keeping track of proceedings. The wordings must be factual, precise, clear, highly informative, brief and must be devoid of editorial opinion or personal commentary. Minutes have a conventional format. They are headed with the title of the meeting concerned, its venue, the date and time it was held. The names of those in attendance will be shown, with apologies for absences. The name of the person in charge of the meeting is also highlighted. In recording the business done; the actions decisions and discussions at the meeting are summarized. The practice varies from body to body. Some minutes contain only the bare resolutions that have been passed, whereas other will include names of proposers and seconders. At times, brief accounts of the arguments leading to the decisions are included.

The well-organized minutes of a formal meeting, written by an approved secretary, may have marginal headings for quick reference. At times each item is numbered. In order to provide a complete historical record, the items are often numbered consecutively, following from one set of minutes to the next. This is particularly important where minutes are kept in loose leaf binders; as it is a reasonable proof that none is missing. The minutes of Academic Board meetings provide a good example.

Because minutes are the official record, they are signed by the person who prepares them and are kept in file. Often, minutes are duplicated and a copy is sent to each person present at the meeting as well as those people who could not attend. They are approved at the following meeting after being read or circulated. The Chairman and secretary then append their signatures.

*Exercise 4*

As the secretary of the Students’ Representative Council, write the minutes of the inaugural

meeting of the council with the Dean of Students’ Affairs in attendance.

**Characteristics of reports**

These are certain characteristics which are expected of all formal reports. These are discussed below.

***Title:***

The title of the report is usually made in all-capital letters or in capital and lower-case letters. It may be underlined. It must be appropriate and inviting. It appears at the beginning of the write-up and must be careful written. It must predict the contents of the report.

***Abstract:***

The abstract is a brief summary of the report, usually written after the report has been written. It informs the busy reader what to expect and he can decide immediately if the report is useful to him or not.

***Terms of Reference:***

The terms of reference is the introductory part of the report, where the background for the report is given and an attempt is made to put in a nutshell, the purpose of the report.

***Facts:***

The facts are the body of the report. This section should clearly state all the necessary relevant facts to this report. Opinion and generalizations are out of place at this stage. Details and figures which may confuse the reader should be reserved for the appendix.

***Conclusion:***

The conclusion should answer questions such as: What do the facts indicate? What are the likely possibilities from these facts? What is happening now? This section shows the result of reasons analysed and it serves as a basis for recommendations.

***Recommendations:***

The recommendations pertain to the course of action to be taken now or in the future as a result of the report. They are supported by conclusions and aimed towards accomplishing the report’s purpose. They answer questions such as: What is to be done? By whom? When? Where? How?

In a long formal report, you may need to add references and appendices to make the report complete. References refer to the list of sources consulted in the process of building the report. (The references at the end of this book present a good example for you to follow.) Appendices refer to the other relevant pieces of information, which are too long to be in the main report.

Note that there are other ways of arranging the material. Your choice should depend on your reader, the time available for reading and acting on the report, the importance of certain parts of the report and the types of information. Here are some examples:  
i. Terms of reference

Previous Findings

Present Investigation

Facts

Conclusion

Recommendation

ii. Terms of reference

Survey of present system

Investigation

Result

Suggested Solutions

**Stages in report writing**

There are five main steps in writing a report:

1. Preparation
2. Classification of material
3. Outlining
4. Writing the report
5. Review

***Preparation***

First of all, the writer must know his terms of reference. The terms of reference are the instructions given to help in the preparation and writing of the report. They must make clear the following:

1. The type of information to be provided
2. How much information to be provided
3. The purpose of the report
4. The urgency of the report

You need a full understanding of the problem, its situation and full scope. The terms of reference of a report might read as follows:

1. Please, investigate the possibility of replacing the present feeding system in the university and recommend the easiest way of doing this without disrupting feeding for students. A brief report is required before the Joint Council Meeting of 18th Oct., 2014.
2. An investigation to show why production of bread in the bread factory has fallen in the past six months, how it may quickly be restored, and what long term measures are needed.

While collecting material for your report, you must keep in mind the terms of reference. There is a need for a plan of action, stating how you intend to seek for your data and your sources of information. This is very important if you need to collect the material within a limited time. You may follow these steps in collecting your material, during your research.

1. Decide what you need
2. Consider what you have already
3. Analyze your data
4. Seek out the remaining needed data

Materials may be obtained by interviewing people, circulating questionnaires, direct observation and experiment or by reading relevant texts, journals and papers. This is further discussed later in this chapter.

***Classification***

Classification is the sorting of material into a form that is convenient for viewing. This involves the way of presenting information to the reader, i.e. in which order the material is to be arranged. When you have collected all the available information, you then select those items which come within the scope of your terms of reference and arrange the material in a definite order. This may be firstly, chronological, i.e. following the stages of the investigation in its time sequence. Secondly, it may be geographical, i.e. under the headings of different areas. It may also be in terms of increasing complexity-starting with the well-known information and progressing to the new material, or vise-versa. It may be functional-separating the information into the different functions e.g. reports on present feeding system and methods of changing to the new one. It may be the order of importance.

There are other ways in which your material could be arranged. The choice of method depends on the content of the report and the expected reader of the report.

***Outlining***

Outlining is very useful and helpful in report writing. It provides an assembly line for building the report. It helps you to place each fragment of information in the proper place without your having to re-write the entire report. The use of outlines results into the production of better reports. Even though you may spend a great deal of time developing the outline, it is worth it in the final analysis. Most formal outlines use letters and numbers to set off the various parts e.g.

I --------------------------------

A ------------------------

i ----------------

ii ----------------

II --------------------------------

A ------------------------

i ---------------

ii ---------------

iii ---------------

B -----------------------

i --------------

ii --------------

Factors to be considered are:

1. Length of the report
2. Number of sub-sections
3. Logical sequence
4. The need to break up the material so that prominence is given to important parts with clear heading and sub-headings. This is the time to draw up the outline of the report i.e. its main section, working out the headings and sub-headings which are subject to modification.

***Writing the Report***

After the structure has been outlined, you now need to compose the report with some presentation skill. The success which the receiver of the report will have in using the report as a tool will depend on the reporter’s efficiency in assembling and interpreting data. As discussed above, the drafting of the report must be done within an acceptable framework. You need to first present your original terms of reference. Then you must present the facts in a logical order. It is from these facts that you will draw your conclusions and make your recommendations.

Generally, there are certain conditions which an effective report must meet, these are enumerated below:

1. It must meet the need of the situation, purpose and the reader calling for it.
2. It must be well planned and organized.
3. It must adapt format and presentation to purpose, message and reader.
4. It must reflect good and clear thinking.
5. It must present the material for easy and quick comprehension.
6. It must interest the reader.
7. It must make effective use of visual aids, statistics etc. when necessary.
8. It must motivate action (especially if it is the analytical type).
9. It must solve in the best way the problem it is meant to solve.

***Review***

This includes editing the report, typing and submission. Always read through your work at the rough draft stage, final manuscript and typescript. Criticize yourself ruthlessly. Remove awkward phrases or semi-relevant materials, without hesitation. The following questions are useful in ascertaining that your content is valid:

1. Have purpose and objectives been attained?
2. Have accuracy and completeness been maintained in background material scope? Numerical data, tables and charts? Etc.
3. Are recommendations the outgrowth of the conclusions; are they workable?

To ascertain mechanical accuracy, appropriate style and form, these questions are useful:

1. Is there correct usage in spelling, punctuation and grammar?
2. Has the standard form been adhered to?
3. Is the typing standard?
4. Are correct forms used for footnotes and bibliography?

The following questions are useful in checking readability and adaptation:

1. Is the tone proper?
2. Is it easy to understand?
3. Is the material suited or adapted to the reader’s knowledge and experience?
4. Is the interest of the reader sustained?

**Methods of gathering data**

Every report writer has to have sources of information. He needs to know how to seek out facts, how to learn quickly a little more than he already knows about some topic that may be presented to him, how to check and verify the facts which he collects, how to evaluate them, and how to do what other people have said about them, and how to do all this quickly and efficiently. When the data is from first hand observation, it is said to be primary information from a primary source. However, when first hand observation is not possible, other sources are explored: these are said to be secondary. Data could be gathered through:

* Interviews
* Questionnaire
* Observations
* The Library
* The Net

***Interviews***

This is a widely used survey method of gathering data. It involves a face to face verbal exchange with the aims of discovering as much information as possible in the least amount of time about some relevant matter. It is a valuable primary source of information but the interviewer must watch out to prevent bias, imperfect observation or taking opinions for facts. Every interview should be preceded by adequate preparation and planning. There is a need to fully understand the problem, plot questions to save time and make the actual interview productive. For best results, care should be taken that the environment is conductive. If it is held in private, it will avoid interruptions, and the physical arrangement in the room should put the interviewee at ease. The interviewer’s honor is important. He should be understanding and not overbearing.

***Questionnaire***

This is also a widely used survey method of gathering data, particularly in the behavioral sciences. It involves the writing and designing of questions on a form which is then made available in several copies and the copies served to prospective respondents. It saves time and is an inexpensive way of surveying a large cross-section of people. Respondents can answer privately and anonymously, and they have plenty of time to think about their answers. The questionnaire contains a covering letter to clarify its intent and purpose and questions that are relevant to the information required in writing a report and it should be designed in such a way as to cover all aspects of the problem. However, as few questions as possible should be used to avoid boring the respondents. The questions should be unambiguous, easy to understand and easy to answer. Very personal and vague questions are to be avoided.

A questionnaire can be a combination of open-ended, close-ended or dichotomous questions. Opened questionnaires are those which do not limit responses, whereby respondents are permitted to react freely. Closed questionnaires on the other hand, limit the responses to questions as answers are often already designed in a tabular form with spaces or boxes provided for the respondents to choose from. In most cases, this is done by just ticking the answer that speaks the mind of the respondent while dichotomous questions usually require a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. For ease of analysis however, it is easier to tackle the closed or dichotomous questionnaire. An example of an open-ended question is: “What do you think of the federal government’s measures in curtailing the Ebola virus in Nigeria?” Responses to this question will vary from one respondent to another. The same question could also be presented in a close-ended format as follows: The federal government measures in curtailing the Ebola virus in Nigeria has been: (a) Excellent (b) Very good (c) Good (d) Fair (e) Poor

Instruction: (pick one)

***Observation***

This is the means of getting the information first hand; information could be obtained from experiments carried out in the laboratory or on the field. This should be the last step since you will know by then exactly what to look for. As usual, have a plan, know what you want and jot down observations immediately. You may take photographs or make drawings. Do not rely on your memory alone! Remember that an effective research requires informed observations. There is no doubt that laboratory and field experiments afford the learner the opportunity of observation and arriving at conclusions on his own. It makes for ability to pass on such information for use even by coming generations. The ultimate goal of a laboratory experiment is to make universal rules to help others.

***Library***

Even though, most library sources are secondary there are some primary sources there. Most materials of value have direct solutions to a problem and background information may be found through printed sources. This could be obtained by consulting reference books, encyclopedia, journals, magazines, periodicals, newspapers, year books and other books. You can also consult the catalogue to help you locate needed materials. You may also need to consult organizational records like pamphlets, reports etc.

***The Net***

There is hardly any topic in this world on which information is not available on the NET. This is one of the main advantages of the ICT and it should be explored.

*Exercise* 5

a. Adopting the close-ended format, prepare a questionnaire to assess and evaluate the reading culture amongst students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

b. List the characteristics of a good report.

**Projects**

This is sometimes referred to as the thesis. It is a form of report that differs only slightly from the other types of reports. It is usually written to communicate with anyone and not just a specific group of people. The paragraphs are usually longer, the sentences longer and more complex. Generally, the third person is used. It is the exposure of the findings from a hypothesis that one has chosen e.g.

“Failure in English Language in WASC Examinations: Causes and Cure.”

There must be genuine reason for choosing a particular subject matter. This must be the student’s own choice, not an imposition on him by the supervisor.

In order to get your topic, you can consult relevant books, journals, past project reports, or discuss with your Supervisor.

***In Investigation and Presentation:***

1. Have a full understanding of the problem and its scope.
2. Define the problem.
3. Decide the extent of investigation
4. Gather all facts and data, using these to create ideas.
5. Organize and interpret the material to reach conclusions
6. Propose and consider all possible solutions.
7. Determine the best solution.
8. Choose a course of action for putting the solution into effect.
9. Outline the materials for presentation.
10. Write up the report.
11. Revise, proof-read, type and edit the report.
12. Release the report for pre-submission review by a more experienced colleague.

***Suggested Outline of the Project Report:***

1. Preliminary Sections:
2. **Cover:** This identifies and projects the report. Title, author and date are sufficient information.
3. **Flyleaf:** Precedes the title page giving a note of formality
4. **Title page:** Provides complete identification.

**4. Table of contents:** Outlines topic in the report, facilitating reference by giving page numbers for each topic stated as well as preliminary and supplementary section in the report.

**5. Abstract:** It summarizes the content of the project report. It should include the following; aim and scope of the report, a statement of the problem being investigated, the methodology employed and the conclusions. Although the abstract is found at the beginning of a project, it is best written after all other sections have been completed and thereafter inserted in the right position.

1. Report Text**:**

This includes introduction, review of related literature, research design and procedure, presentation and analysis of data, and discussion of results, i.e. conclusion and recommendation.

1. Supplementary Sections
2. **Appendices:** this presents supplementary materials which if placed in the body of the report might disturb or delay the reading process. They contain record and reference materials such as large tables and charts, sample questionnaire used etc.
3. **Bibliography:** this is a list of all the authors that one has read in the course of writing a project. Failure to do this leads to plagiarism. Plagiarism is a form of stealing, a serious offence which involves using the words of others as if they were your own. It indicates lack of honesty. You cannot quote an author without giving him credit. Therefore it is important to have a list of the books consulted in the course of your research. A bibliography is arranged alphabetically: e.g Soyinka, Wole. The Man Died: cannot come before Achebe, Chinua. Things Fall Apart. A thesis without a bibliography is like a legal practitioner quoting authorities without citations. The bibliography is a window on the thesis through which the reader discerns the scope. In this regard, care must be taken to include only works examined in the course of the research, a few of which may not of course be referred to in the text. The project author should provide information indicating books, articles and other sources consulted or examined.

*Books:*author, title (and subtitle) place, publisher, year of publication.

*Articles:* author, title of periodical, publisher, page numbers.

1. **End notes/footnotes:** use this when you quote the exact words of others.

*Exercise 6*

Write short notes on the following:

1. Types of report
2. Stages in report writing
3. Basic outline of a report
4. Methods of gathering data

*Exercise 7*

a. What is a report?

b. Differentiate between two types of reports you are familiar with.

c. What is the importance of report writing?

*Exercise 8*

a. Write a report on the services of the school cafeteria to students since the beginning of the semester. Your report should include suggestions and recommendations towards the progress of the cafeteria.

b. Compare formal and informal reports.

c. Make an outline of components of a project.

*Exercise 9*

a. Enumerate the stages of presentation of a report.

b. Identify and explain the various ways of collecting data for a report.

*Exercise* 10. Write a report on any academic course you completed last semester, bringing out those aspects which were of particular value, and making suggestions on possible areas of review for the next session.

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