

# Lecture 06

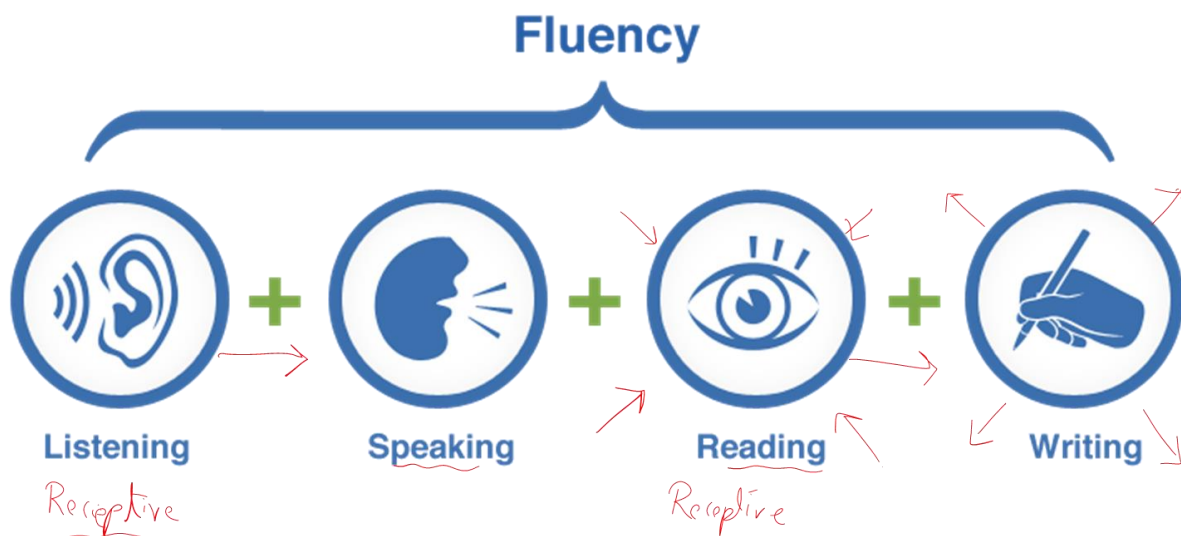
## Four Skills of Language Learning

The communication process starts when a child starts cooing and babbling. With the passage of time this process becomes complex. The child acquires different words and sometimes, the child learns two languages at a time. Gradually the child learns to combine words to make phrases and sentences. This helps the child become a good interlocutor. As time passes, the need arises for written communication. It is the most advanced of the four skills and helps to preserve culture and history. Civilizations pass on their cultural knowledge and interpretations of scripture through books and sometimes engravings on tablets.

### 6.1 Receptive Skills & Productive Skills

**Reading and listening** are called **receptive skills** as knowledge is coming towards you from some sender. Whereas, **speaking and writing** are **productive skills** as you are sending out information towards your audience. If you observe, you cannot develop productive skills without using your receptive skills. If a child is hearing impaired, he/she won't be able to speak as there is no input. Similarly, if you are not reading anything, you won't be able to compose anything well as your brain won't have the knowledge of sentence structure, punctuation and organization patterns.

Writing skill develop at the end as it is the most advanced of the four skills. Then, there are different types of writing skills according to the audience, context and objective. Report writing comes under the general category of Technical writing.



### 6.2 What is Technical Writing?

*Involving special knowledge, language, etc., that is used or understood by experts but usually not by others"*

(Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015)

According to Merriam Webster (2015), technical writing involves special knowledge that is not used by lay people. For example, a mechanical engineer describing the working of a boiler plant would be sharing specialized knowledge using technical vocabulary.

*“Relating to the knowledge, machines or methods used in science and industry”*

(Cambridge Dictionary, 2015)

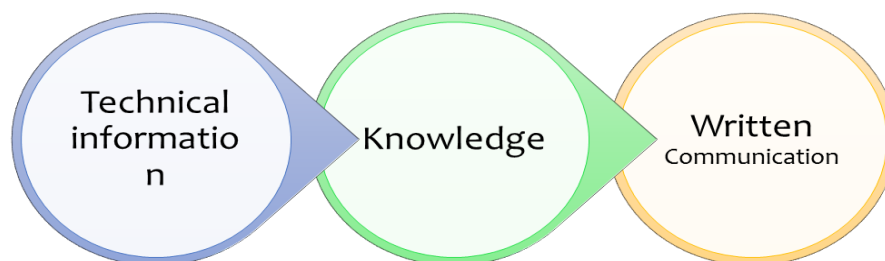
Similarly, according to Cambridge dictionary, a link is established between the knowledge of science and industry and machines when technical writing is used to describe their working.

Thus, we come to the conclusion that technical writing communicates **specific and factual information** to a **defined audience** for a **defined purpose**. When composing any report, letter or memo, the information you are giving is of specific nature; it is related to your topic and focuses on facts. The facts you state need to be authentic and reliable. Even information present on Wikipedia cannot be cited in your report. Proper research and citation is necessary if you are stating statistics or figures. This erases out the possibility of assumption and conjecture and makes your writing factual. The next thing to focus is your defined audience. The report is structured according to your **target audience**. The target audience may be low tech, high tech or lay audience as discussed in earlier lectures. The identification of purpose for which you are composing the report comes next. At the very outset, you should be clear about **the objectives** that you have to achieve through your write-up. An analytical report has different objectives as compared to an informative report.



### 6.2.1 Three Criteria to Make your Writing Technical

The following figure provides **three criteria** that your writing should meet in order to become technical. First, it should provide technical information. Second, the audience should get the knowledge they seek through your write-up. If a report is about the effects of aerosol sprays on ozone layer, the audience should receive authentic, up-to-date and comprehensive knowledge on the topic. Third, as your report is in black and white, you need to follow all the rules of language and of report writing that you are learning in this module.



### 6.2.2 Definition of Technical Writing by Markel

If you look at the definition provided by Markel, you notice the word **'practical'**. As technical writing is carried out in the field of business, science and industry, the language and format should be such that it helps the target audience understand the working of a machine, for example, or such that it provides them instructions to carry out a task successfully. Imagine getting a manual with an air-conditioner that you have purchased. If the manual is composed in obscure language and you fail to comprehend it, you won't be able to set up your appliance and the manual will fail to achieve its objective.

“Technical writing **conveys specific information about a technical subject** to a **specific audience** for a **specific purpose...** The words and graphics of technical writing are meant to be **practical**: that is, to communicate a body of **factual information** that will help an audience understand a subject or carry out a task.”

**-Michael H. Markel**

### 6.3 Origin of Technical Writing

The origins of technical writing date back to the time of Da Vinci. He gave the idea to set up a machine by composing an instruction manual. That machine was helicopter. Moving on in history, there is another prominent name, Copernicus. He gave the heliocentric theory and rejected the geocentric theory. According to heliocentric theory, sun is the center around which all other planets revolve. When he documented that theory, it certainly needed the proper use of technical language.

Increasing rate of literacy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also increased the need of technical writers as knowledge of science and technology needed to be preserved in writing. The Second World War augmented the need even further as manuals were published along with the massive production of weapons. Similarly, books and manuals were composed describing the technology of nuclear bombs. Computer revolution at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century made technical writing essential for anybody who wanted to become a member of the global village as composing content for websites, webinars, videos and audios demanded the use of technical writing.