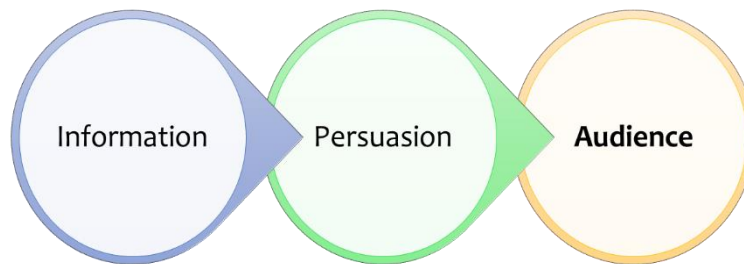


Lecture 08

Objectives/Traits in Technical Writing

The first question that comes up when you are preparing to compose a report is '**Why are you writing?**'

There are three basic components that decide the answer of this question: information needed, persuasion required, and audience's needs and wants.



Exercise:

As a health advisor in an atomic plant, imagine writing a report for technicians on the harmful effects of radiation. As you are writing for low-tech audience, give detailed information (facts, stats, references) and move on to recommend ways to reduce exposure time in radiation area, measures to be taken if exposed to radiation and precautions to be observed while working there.

Your task is to make them aware of the potential hazards of radiation so that they are persuaded to practice caution.

8.1 Understanding Audience

The first step in understanding audience is to consider their **level of education**. For instance, while composing a report on how to tackle bullying in educational institutions, the nature of content and the manner of writing will differ for students of Grade 05 and students of O levels.

The second step in understanding audience is to gauge their level of knowledge about the subject you are writing. The **background knowledge** of the audience on the topic provides the foundation on which you will build up further. It helps you avoid giving out information that they already know and focus on knowledge that they lack. Third, keep in mind your **relationship with the audience**. Your audience maybe your boss, your students or your colleagues. Choose your content, tone and language accordingly.

According to Guffey and Du-Babcock (2008), if you give priority to audience's benefit by putting yourself in their shoes, your writing will appeal to the audience. To develop empathy for the readers, they suggest, adopt a positive tone, cultivate a "You-Attitude", sound conversational, and use familiar vocabulary (p.33).

8.2 How to enhance the probability of comprehension for the audience?

If you consider the following points while composing your report, the probability of comprehension increases for the audience:

- Clarity
- Conciseness
- Accessible document design
- Audience recognition
- Accuracy (grammar)

8.2.1 Clarity

By clarity we mean that your writing is easily understood by your intended audience. Murphy, Hildebrandt, & Thomas suggest these two guidelines for achieving clarity (2008, p. 48):

- Use of 'precise, concrete and familiar' vocabulary
- Make 'effective sentences and paragraphs'

Example:

Unfamiliar: Employees' remuneration is still not decided.

Familiar: Employees' pay hasn't been decided yet.

Keeping sentence length to about 17 to 20 words, introducing single main idea in the beginning of paragraph and supporting it with vivid details help you create effective sentences and paragraphs.

Example:

Unclear: Students should be confident and have clear understanding of the subject, and these qualities are the prerequisites that we need.

Clear: Prerequisites in students include clear understanding of the subject and confidence.

Here are some more points to be practiced to achieve clarity:

- i. Avoid ambiguity
- ii. Prefer the active voice

- iii. Exclude personal introduction and conclusion
- iv. Use transition words

- i. To avoid ambiguity, choose a clear sentence structure.

Example:

Ambiguous: When the presentation was going on, our students expressed dislike for it.

Clear: Our students expressed dislike for the presentation when it was going on.

- ii. When active voice is used, the subject is the doer of the action, comes first and gets the emphasis. It results in making sentences clearer.

Example:

Passive: The pact was signed and approved in the last meeting.

Active: The President signed and approved the pact in the last meeting.

However, **passive voice** should be used if you want to deemphasize bad news or want to avoid blaming a certain individual for some wrong deed of her.

Example:

Passive: Your laptop has not been repaired yet.

Active: We have not repaired your laptop yet.

Example:

Passive: This loss has been caused due to delayed response.

Active: The delayed response of Mr. Naveed caused this loss.

- iii. Excluding personal introduction and conclusion makes your writing neutral and free of bias.

Example:

I think that Pakistani society was more liberal and tolerant back in 1990s.

Pakistani society was more liberal and tolerant in 1990s.

- iv. Use of transition words create cohesion in your writing. They combine thoughts between sentences for making the flow smoother and the switching of idea less abrupt. Some commonly used transition words are as follows:

Nevertheless

Likewise

Alternatively

Consequently

However

Therefore

Although

Furthermore

Example:

It rained heavily last night. Several streets got flooded with water and there was no electricity.

As a consequence of heavy rain last night, several streets flooded with water and power failed.

Example:

Pour one cup milk in the saucepan, then add one egg, add sugar and then mix it.

First, pour a cup of milk in the saucepan; second, add an egg and sugar; and third, stir the mixture.

8.2.2 Conciseness

Conciseness means communicating in the shortest possible way without compromising meaning. A concise text is complete but is not wordy. Moreover, it saves time and lets you emphasize important details. Observe the following guidelines in your writing to make your document concise:

i. Write positively

Using positive language makes your text concise.

Consider this example
Wordy: You did not attend the class yesterday.
Concise: You missed the class yesterday.

ii. Paragraph often

When you paragraph often, you divide lengthy ideas in small paragraphs with vivid details and examples. Reader finds the main idea and supporting details laid out neatly in the form of a small paragraph and there is no need to go into unnecessary detail. Also, the average length of your paragraph should not exceed 60 to 100 words.

iii. Use reasonable sentence length

Keep sentences short so that readers don't have to remember too much information to understand the sentence. Most sentences should have an average of 20 words. If a sentence exceeds 40 words, try to find a way to break it up into smaller sentences.

Example:
Wordy: The instructor taught us several new ways to make our writing to-the-point, and less wordy.
Concise: The instructor taught us ways to write concisely.

iv. Avoid redundant expressions

Wordy	Concise
We are working together in collaboration.	We are working together.
Any specific type of pasta dish is fine with me.	Any pasta dish is fine with me.

The toy is round in shape.	The toy is round.
My clutch is shiny in appearance.	My clutch is shiny.

v. **Avoiding prepositional phrases**

Wordy	Concise
The obvious effect <i>of</i> such a range <i>of</i> reference is to assure the audience <i>of</i> the author's range <i>of</i> learning and intellect. (Heffernan, Lincoln, & Atwill, 1996, p. 55)	The wide-ranging references in this talk assure the audience that the author is intelligent and well-read.
She needs to put up with their tantrums.	She should tolerate their tantrums.
It was such an unexpected surprise.	It was a surprise!
At the current point in time we ought to have, as has always been the case in the past, some trust in our worthy President.	As always, we should trust our President now.

vi. **Delete meaningless words**

Avoid words that do not add any meaning to a sentence:

- Basically
- Generally
- Kind of
- Actually

Wordy	Concise
Basically, a report is structured according to its purpose.	A report is structured according to its purpose.
I was kind of confused.	I was confused.
Generally speaking, they played well.	They played well.

vii. **Delete doubled words**

Do not use word pairs that mean the same thing.

Concise	Wordy
Be clear about the aims and objectives.	Be clear about the objectives.

Each and every one of my classmates attended the party.	Each of my classmates attended the party.
First and foremost, look for hypothesis.	First, look for hypothesis.

viii. **Deleting redundant categories**

- Round in shape
- Large in size
- Blue in color
- Heavy in weight
- Sour in taste
- Shiny in appearance
- Smooth in texture
- Honest in character

Concise	Wordy
The latest happenings are unusual in nature.	The latest happenings are unusual.
Alfredo is creamy and delicious in taste.	Alfredo is creamy and delicious.
Often times, I forget to remind him.	I often forget to remind him.

ix. **Reduce phrases to words**

Many phrases can be expressed in fewer words or even in a single word.

Phrases	Words
For this reason	So
Due to the fact that	Because
At a much greater rate than	Faster
Despite the fact that	Although
A great deal of	Much

References

- Guffey, M. E., & Du-Babcock, B. (2008). Writing for business audiences. In *Essentials of business communication* (p. 33). Pakistan: Cengage Learning.
- Heffernan, J. A., Lincoln, J. E., & Atwill, J. (1996). *Writing, a college handbook*. New York: W.W. Norton.
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