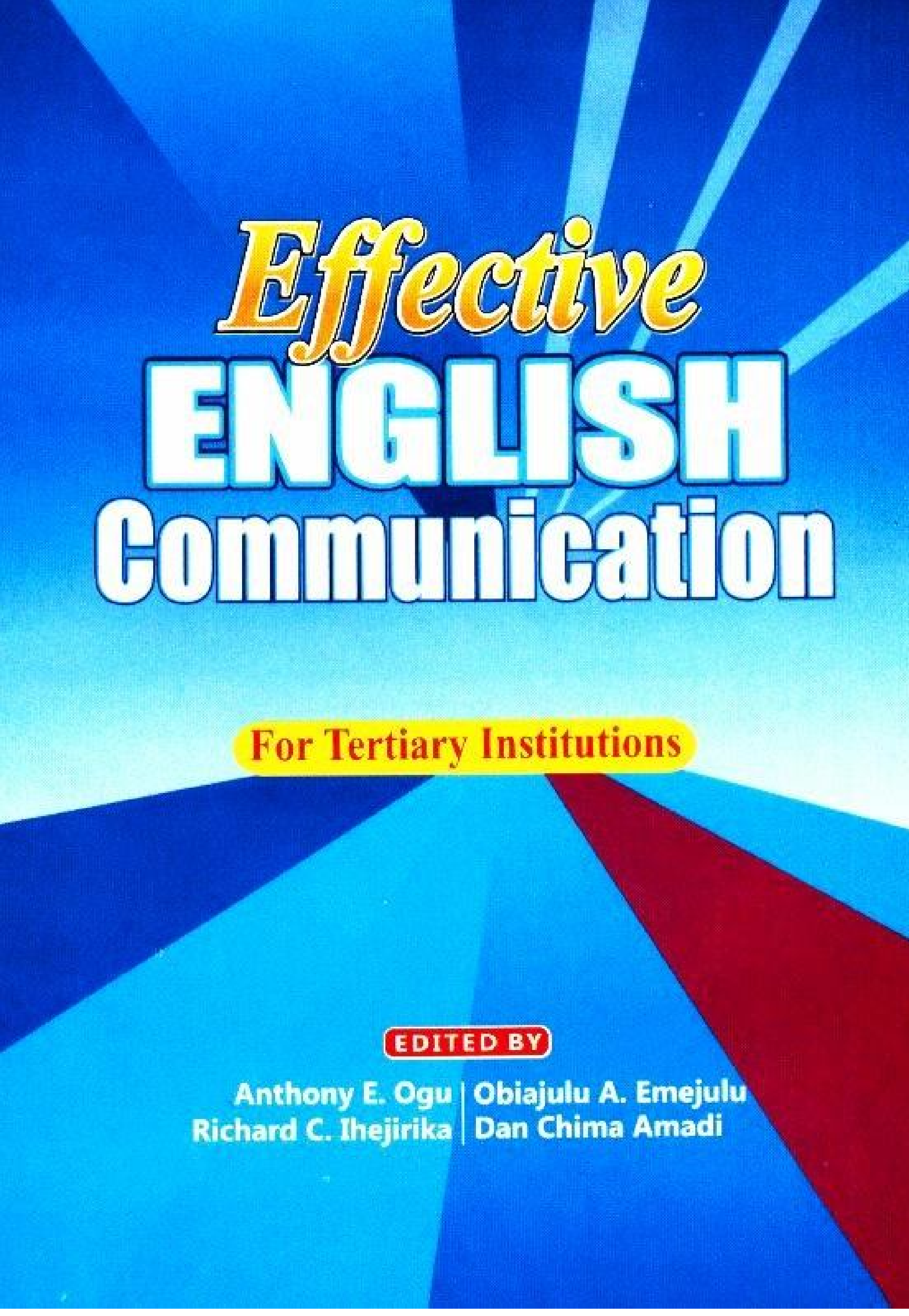

Effective ENGLISH Communication

For Tertiary Institutions

EDITED BY

Anthony E. Ogu | Obiajulu A. Emejulu
Richard C. Ihejirika | Dan Chima Amadi

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Published in Nigeria, 2016
SKILLMARK MEDIA LTD.
18 Kagha Street Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.
e-mail: skillmarkmedia@yahoo.com
website: www.skillmarkmedia.com
Tel: 08036690084, 08051090040

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TREASURE BOOKS
SKILLMARK MEDIA LTD.

ISBN: 978-978-49164-3-3

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all our English teachers at all levels of education, who lit the light in us that is now a source of illumination to many.

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CHAPTER FIVE

REPORT WRITING

Chika Opara and Uche Nnamani

5.1 WHAT IS A REPORT?

A report is an account of any incident or event that has been either witnessed or investigated. It is a document which examines carefully a specific problem with a view to convey information, report findings, draw conclusions and recommend actions. A report could also be in form of special duty assignment for one to study. For instance; one may be asked to write a report on the recent fire outbreak in Ekeonunwa Market for instance.

From the definitions above you can see that report writing is a common feature of human interactions. It is a communication mode which helps us to develop our work and living environments. A report is different from an essay in that it originates primarily to convey specific information for a specific purpose to a specific reader.

5.2 AIMS OF REPORTS

There are basically four main objective of reports. These are:

- To give a straight forward, clearly structured account of an issue.
- To provide information
- To answer a question
- To offer solution to a problem or recommendation for actions.
- To help the authorities take action

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5.3 FEATURES OF A GOOD REPORT

The main aim of a report is to inform and to do this effectively, a report must have the following basic features.

i. Clarity

Clarity is one of the most important features to consider while writing a report. One of the key elements of effective report is clarity. No matter how accurate and interesting your report is, you cannot achieve your objective (to inform) if your audience is struggling to understand your message. Hence you must present your facts in an understandable manner. To do this you should use simple words to get your point across faster than the complex words.

The reason is that simple words make your report direct and easily understood. For example, the sentence: He runs the company like his own is better than: He operates the company like his own. Again, the more specific you are, the more likely people are to understand you. For instance, Assistant general manager says more than 'Top executive officer'. Finally, your message will be clearer if you use familiar words. Acronyms, abbreviations and jargon are communication shortcuts. They are only effective when the majority of readers understand your references.

ii. Conciseness

Conciseness means ability to be brief, yet including *all* important information. When a report writer uses unnecessary words in his report the meaning of the message is diluted. So read through your works in order to check sentences or words that are redundant, needlessly repetitive or not required. For example in the phrase 'connect together' the word 'together' is redundant. Also the sentences: "My new vice chancellor is not like my former vice-chancellor. The new vice chancellor takes more risks, can be combined to read. The new vice chancellor takes more risk than the former". Note that being concise does not mean that all your sentences must be brief. An interesting report typically has a variety of sentence types or lengths.

iii. Proper Organization

You should ensure that your report is organized in a way that allows your audience to read and progress smoothly. Organize your points chronologically from first point to second point and into third point.

iv. Completeness

In this context completeness means that you have treated all the necessary or normal components or steps of a report. You should treat the entire sections of the report. The three compulsory parts namely, introduction, body and conclusion must be exhaustively treated.

5.4 CLASSIFICATION OF REPORTS

Unlike essays or letters which have specified formats, reports come in different forms of display, depending on the subject, degree of technically, and convenience and the prevalent style or convention. Little (1965) identified three recognized forms: the letter form, the mixed form, and the schematic form. However, there are different types of reports which could be classified using different criteria. Reports are classified into types: according to medium, the context, the length and forms.

5.4.1 Classification according to Medium

Oral report: Reports in this category are in two forms; Oral and written reports. Oral report, as the name indicates is a verbal representation of an event witnessed. Oral report covers such incidence as eye-witnessed events, work report and thesis defense etc. Such reports are commonly used in dealing with simple problems that arise in day to day administration in a company or an institution. They are presented when there is need for immediate feedback or when discussion is required.

Written report: our major concern in this course is the written reports because they are of more serious nature. It is the most effective means of communication and it provides a permanent record that can be referred to from time to time and circulated to others.

5.4.2 Classification of Report according to Content

In this context, reports are classified on the basis of the facts and information the reports constitute. Examples of such reports are: accident report, armed robbery report, ills observed in a company or an institution. These kinds of reports are written in explanatory form and presented chronologically.

5.4.3 Reports Classified according to Length

Reports are also classified according to length. We have long or detailed report and short or summary report. In writing long and detailed report, an omission of a section could impair comprehension. On the other hand, short reports are usually centered on few salient points. It may be a simple investigative report. The basis of classification here is the length. The difference between the two is basically on the format.

5.4.4 Reports Classified by Forms.

There are generally three recognized forms namely: letter form, mixed form and schematic form.

i. **Letter Form:**-The letter form of report takes the features of the formal or official letter writing. The subject matter is usually simple and direct and limited. It presents only one view point. An example is a police report.

ii. **Mixed form:**- This is a mixture of the letter form and the schematic form. In this type of report, the letter form is followed until the section of findings where the items are numbered as in the schematic form. The report then ends in a letter form.

iii. **Schematic form:**- This method is used in presenting a detail complex and extensive report rather than letter form. Schematic format follows a pattern of major headings and sub-headings arranged in order of subordination. There are headings and subheadings, indentations and numbering of the various sections of the report which make it easy to refer to any section of the report. The major points are indented to reveal the various degree of attention value. In this form of report you should know how to divide and sub-divide because your readers can select any part of it for a closer study. Some of the examples of schematic reports include: a term papers, staff appraisal report and other analytical and investigation reports.

5.5 IMPORTANCE OF REPORTS

Reports serve varied needs in the contemporary society. Some of the uses of a report include the following:

i. It provides basic information to the management of any organization about development of the system.
ii. It provides ideas which are further used to initiate new polices and modify old ones in an organization.
iii. It provides a permanent record that can be referred to in future.
iv. It helps in systematic presentation of facts in an organization.
v. It presents objective and factual information.
vi. It is used to discover the nature of certain problems that arise in a given company so as to determines a plan of action.
vii. It serves reference purposes to both the report writer and the receiver.
viii. It is an effective way of communicating new ideas and procedure in a company. The written record can be duplicated in large quantity and distributed to people.
ix. A report is also useful for documenting the success or progress of some project in a company.

5.6 REPORT WRITING TIPS

The following are report writing tips you should try to adopt to produce a good report:

i. You should write your report honestly.
ii. Do not be influenced by others or falsify facts.

iii. Write the report immediately after the event or the delegation visit to the locus in quo while the incident is still fresh in your mind.
iv. Organize your information by writing an outline before commencing the report.
v. Write a first draft.
vi. Re-write to improve the draft.
vii. Only include relevant facts. Your opinion is only necessary if specifically asked for.
viii. Include graphics, tables and visuals
ix. Avoid jargon and pejorative remarks. Organize the report chronologically.
x. Give actual dates.
xi. Check spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors before submitting.
xii. Your report should be typed, signed and dated.
xiii. Note how, when and to whom you submit it.

5.7 TYPES OF REPORT

5.7.1 Investigation Report

Though all reports involve some measure of investigation, this type of report is specially called for by an establishment or institution to look into any problem confronting it with a view to finding solutions or stemming future occurrence. It is usually produced by an individual or a committee with detailed information on the matter under investigation for the consideration of the originating authority. Investigation report has the following features:

A. **Title Page:** This section contains the sender, recipient and the subject of the report.

B. **Terms of Reference:** Contains the scope or areas to be covered by the investigation procedure

C. **Procedure:** This has to do with the method employed in investigating the problem otherwise called investigative procedure or method of data collection. Some of the methods used in collecting data include: interviews, questionnaires, memoranda, experiments etc.

D. **Findings:** Here the reporter states discoveries made during investigation and he presents them in their factual and raw form.

E. **Conclusions:** This represents the critical analysis and objective assessment of the finding with a view to formulating a value judgment. In this section, the writer presents main points arising from the report in a definite and brief manner. You should conclude your report with finality i.e your audience should know the result obtained and the conclusion reached. There is no room for the writer's personal opinion because a report is a factual and objective document.

F. **Recommendations:** Here the reporter proffers solutions to the problems investigated as well as gives suggestions to stem future occurrence.

G. **Signature/Date:** Your signature should come before the date.

Note: What we have presented here is a general format for a short report. There are other kinds of lengthier investigation reports that may incorporate elaborate formats as we shall see in the section, "The structure of a report".

5.7.2 Trip/Work Report

This report arises out of a field trip undertaken, conference or workshop attended, in-service training or problems analyzed outside your work environment. You might be required to document and present not only your expenses but the experiences garnered which information might be of benefit to your establishment in good stead in terms of future growth and development. The normal format for this type of report is as follows:

i. **Heading/ Title**

Here the writer provides a clear idea of the subject matter of the report

a. Date: Your report should be dated.
b. To: State the authority who assigned the report or one whom the report is addressed to.
c. From: You are required to write the name or names of the persons , or institutions who wrote the report
d. Subject: This is the report topic.

ii. **Introduction or Background**

a. Purpose
b. Personnel
c. Authorization

iii. **Discussion**

This represents the body where you discuss your findings with a view to setting agenda or policy direction for your establishment.

iv. Conclusion/Recommendation

What you learnt or accomplished and the potential benefits to your establishments. Then your suggestions for future actions, in terms of policy containment or change in policy direction.

5.7.3 Progress Reports

This is also an aspect of work report and focuses on reviewing the existing status of any establishment's operations. It is also called activity report and gives periodic account or detailed information on daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual operational status of an establishment, tasks undertaken, challenges encountered, targets and deadlines met etc. It has the same components as trip report above.

i. Heading

a. Date
b. To
c. From
d. Subject or topic

ii. Introduction
iii. Discussion
iv. Conclusion/Recommendation

5.7.4 Incident Report

This is otherwise called eyewitness report and poses such questions as what happened? How did it happen? When did it happen? Why did it happen? Who was involved? (Garson 2000). It is also an aspect of accident or trouble reports and gives an accurate and reliable account of event witnessed or experienced. It has the same format as trip and progress reports above.

5.7.5 Laboratory Report

This report answers the question of how something was done based on observable data that have been scientifically evaluated. The essence of laboratory report is to communicate technical or complex details as outcomes of knowledge acquired during a lab experiment, giving such information as why the test was performed, how it was performed, what the results were and what future action that might be required.

5.7.6 Research Report

This is an academic report usually lengthy and is intended to address the question, what is wrong? It seeks to find solution to an existing problem by posing research questions around a topic or issue under study. Through research, and review of related literature, the researcher hopes to find answers to those questions by either disproving or validating the hypothesis generated. Research Report Contains all the features of a lengthy report with full schematic conventions. According to Emejulu and Ogu (2012), research report has the following features:

A. **Title Page:** This contains the subject matter of the report.
B. **Abstract or summary:** This is a summary of the research findings, conclusions and, possibly, recommendations. It does not usually exceed 300 words.

C. **Table of contents (optional):** A list of the contents of the report with the page references.

D. **List of abbreviations and technical term (optional):** A list of abbreviations, technical terms, and symbols used in the report.

E. **List of tables/figures etc.** (optional): A list of tables or figures used in the report.

F. **Acknowledgements:** The report writer acknowledges the contributions of other people towards the research, including owners of copyright materials he used extensively.

G. **Introduction:** This section specified what the report is about and its relationship with other works in this field. It includes the following:

a. **Statement of the problem:** The problem which the research seeks a solution to is stated (statement of the problem).

b. **Objectives:** This section states what the research is expected to achieve.

c. **The Scope:** The scope covered by the research.

d. **The Significance:** What the research will contribute to knowledge and who will benefit from it.

e. **Theory:** This has to do with the theory on which the present research is built.

H. **Method or methodology or procedures:** This section includes information on how the research was carried out, the selection of subjects for the research, the instruments used, the treatment procedure adopted (in experimental research), and the method of data analysis.

I. **Results:** The outcome of the study is presented without much input from the researcher. Data are organized using tables, charts, etc. and appropriate statistical methods used to establish tendencies and level of significance.

J. **Discussions or interpretation:** The writer gives an interpretation of the observations made in the research. He also relates the outcome to earlier researches in the subject area. The writer shows how much the research outcome validates the research hypotheses, answers the research questions.

K. **Conclusion:** The writer presents an overview of the outcome of the report.

L. **Recommendations (optional):** The writer makes recommendations based on his research findings. Sometimes suggestions for further research are proffered.

M. **References and/or bibliography:** This section contains a list of works cited in the work and works which contain information relevant to the study area. The difference between references and bibliography in the APA model is that references are actually works cited whereas bibliography could include, in addition, works not actually cited but are relevant for further reading on the subject.

N. **Appendices (optional):** This is where materials which the writer feels could disrupt the easy flow of the report are kept. Verbatim transcript of interviews, maps, very long tables, etc. can be kept here if the reader does not need to read them immediately to interpret the data. Items here are numbered and labeled as Appendix (i), Appendix (ii), etc.

O. **Index (optional):** This is a listing of key words and concepts treated in the report with their page references

A Sample of Incident Report

Heading: Car Theft Report
Date: May 15, 2014
To: The Chief Security Officer,
Federal University of Technology, Owerri
From: The Student Union President, Miss Joan Chikwem

This is to report a theft incident which happened in the University campus – Federal University of Technology Owerri, at the department of Electrical Engineering Lecture Hall Two. The incident took place on Wednesday 22nd May, 2015 during Maths 101 lectures at 11:30am.

The object stolen was a car -Camry 2008 model with plate number RVV 406 KVJ which belongs to Dr. Mrs. Chidinma Dike, a Maths 102 lecturer. The car was park in front of the Electrical engineering lecture hall 2. Dr C Dike was teaching in the lecture hall on May, 22nd 2015 on that day before the incident occurred.

I interviewed ten year one undergraduates who were receiving lectures that morning. They were also requested to submit a handwritten note to the chief security officer. From the interview it was gathered that Dr. Mrs. Dike's car was stolen by two masked gun men, after a release of a gunshot.

This incident serves as a reminder to the University administration to be more cautious with regards to the security measures around and within the school premises. Safety of the staff and students should be a prime concern of the school administration; if incident like the above can happen inside the school then the lives of the people inside, can also be at risk.

I hereby recommend that the Security Department conduct a thorough investigation and inform the Registrar appropriately.

Thanks.

Yours faithfully,

Joan Chikwem

CLASS ACTIVITY: Do Exercise 1 of Chapter Five in the workbook to practice writing reports.

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