Work Term Report
Technical Writing
MME Department
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Presentation Outline

1. Report Writing - General Advice
2. Technical Writing 101
3. Grammar Issues
4. Proof Reading
Report Writing – General Advice

• It’s easy to write if you have something to say

• Plan ahead, set up a good work report topic/project
  • Start well ahead of time and organize your thoughts
  • Take notes during the work term – write a little bit every couple of days

• Many students wait until the week before the report is due to start writing. The result is usually a poorly written report.
Report Writing – General Advice

• Put yourself in your successors place
  • Someone will likely be building on your work

• Ask for your predecessors work
  • You’ll likely be building on the work of others

• It’s OK to be building on the work of others, but reference their work.
Report Writing – General Advice

• Write an Outline
  • Start with a ‘big-picture’ outline
  • Focus on the report objective
  • Consider your audience (the marker and your boss)
  • Generate a more detailed outline through ‘successive approximation’
    • Similar process to design
    • Increasing level of detail
      ➢ Add analysis results and figures
      ➢ Make sure all data required for analysis is presented

• Too many will write freeform. The report’s flow usually suffers.
Technical Writing 101

• Technical writing is very different from creative writing

  The best creative writing will give you something new every time you read it. The best technical writing will give you everything the first time you read it.

• The objective is to:
  • Capture Information
  • Communicate Information
  • Persuade
Technical Writing 101

• Clarity of thought
  • Writing is easy if you know what you want to say – focus on your objective statement
  • Make the message clear at every level – sentence, paragraph, section, etc.
• Clear structure, arguments and presentation
  • background comes first
  • increasing complexity follows
• Clear presentation
  • figures and tables are especially important
  • good grammar and correct spelling are essential
Technical Writing 101

• Write What you Mean!!!
  • get the spelling / words /sentence structure right
  • avoiding redundancies, oxymorons, ambiguity

○ A well written document is easy to read
○ Well presented material is easy to remember
Common Grammatical Issues

- **Do not** use 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2\textsuperscript{nd}, or 3\textsuperscript{rd} person
  - e.g. me, I, you, we, our, etc.

- **Do not** refer to yourself in 3\textsuperscript{rd} person
  - e.g. “the student then designed....”

- **Do not** use contractions
  - e.g. can’t, don’t, etc.

- Avoid relative terms. Qualify all statements.
  - **Do not** use conversational language or slang
    - “Retrofitting the fixtures will be rough and will cost loads.”
    - “Retrofitting the fixtures will be strenuous and expensive.”
Common Grammatical Issues

• Check for run on sentences

• Use consistent and logical tense

• Learn how to use Commas properly

• Use active voice

  “The benefits of replacing the light fixtures is being considered by the owner of the factory.”

  ✓ “The owner of the factory is considering the benefits of replacing the light fixtures.”
Proof Reading

• *Poor grammar and writing will hinder your ability to convey the intended message, and undermine your credibility as an engineer*

• Reading your own writing shortly after completion is rarely effective. Your brain tends to miss the errors.

• Rule of Thumb – Once you see about 5 typos in a report, it is likely going to be a re-submit.
Proof Reading

• Strategies
  • Finish early and put the report aside for at least one week. Then proof read it.
  • If time is a problem, read the report out loud.
  • Have a friend read it. Make sure they are reliable, and that they know how to write.
  • Change the font (for proofreading only) to something that is harder to read.

• Do Not expect the marker to be your proof reader.
Questions?