

Investigation Tip Sheet 5

Writing Effective Reports

Accuracy

Check that everything you write is factually accurate. The facts should be capable of being verified. You should not write anything that will misinform, mislead or unfairly persuade your readers. Accurate information is essential for effective communication and decision making.

Objectivity

A report should not be an essay reflecting personal emotions and opinions. The emphasis, therefore, should be on the factual material presented, rather than on any personal beliefs, biases or prejudices.

Conciseness

You should aim to keep your report concise. In doing this, do not mistake brevity for conciseness. A report may be brief because it omits important information. A concise report, on the other hand, is short but still contains all the essential details.

To ensure you do not include material which can safely be left out, you should ask yourself: 'Is it necessary for this information to be included?'

Clarity and Consistency

The best way to achieve clarity in your writing is to allow some time to elapse between the first draft and its revision. Try to leave it over the weekend, or at least overnight. If you are really under pressure and this is simply not possible, at least leave it over a lunch or coffee break. It is essential to have a period of time, no matter how short, when you can think of other things. In this way, when you come back to the report, you can look at it with a degree of objectivity.

Simplicity

Usually, if your writing is selective, accurate, objective, concise, clear and consistent, it will also be as simple as it can be. You should guard against over-simplifying, for example to the point of missing out information which

the reader needs to fully understand what you are trying to say. You should again keep your readers firmly in mind and keep asking yourself whether or not they will be able to follow the logic of your presentation.

Avoid Pointless Words

Some words and phrases - like basically, actually, undoubtedly, each and every one and during the course of our investigation - keep cropping up in reports. Yet they add nothing to the message and often can be removed without changing the meaning or the tone. Try leaving them out of your writing. You will find your sentences survive, succeed and may even flourish without them.



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