
13 SUBMISSIONS TO COMMITTEES

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Introduction

At some time or other most of us find ourselves faced with the task of making a submission even if it is only at an interview or a meeting attended. Submissions of these kinds will usually be a short and straightforward account calling for no more than an orderly arrangement of relevant facts which should be clearly presented. These submissions like those at meetings of clubs and societies and in business, generally on matters of routine, are often made orally.

But in business, whether of government or the private sector, the submission may involve lengthy investigation and research and then assume the proportions of a small book. But whatever the nature of the submission, the object is always the same: to present in adequate form relevant factual information, and sometimes conclusions and recommendations, as a guide to action to be taken. The form taken by the submission will vary with its length and subject-matter, but there are certain general principles common in this form of communication.

Types of submissions

Written reports fall into two classes; routine and special. Many submissions for day-to-day business are routine and deal with matters that periodically occur e.g. reports of a departmental head on the work of his department over a period of time. Presentation of these submissions creates no special problem. Many routine submissions are in fact made on pre-designed forms which simplify the work of preparing and presenting them.

Special Submissions are different. They are not submitted as a matter of general practice but are once only ad hoc reports called for to provide information on matters of particular interest and concern. They cover every conceivable situation in which those asking for the submission are interested and on which information is sought. They range from reports that are no more than replies to requests for information needed to bring a manager up-to-date with development to those which involve prolonged investigation undertaken for the purpose of helping to shape policy.

They may arise from routine submission, where a situation revealed by that submission calls for special action. They may be in summary form and consist of a single sheet or they may be detailed and extend over many pages. They may be made by individual members of staff or by a group or by specialists. They may be made by committees specially appointed to investigate issues of wide-ranging significance. Many government reports are of the last named type and sometimes extend to hundreds of pages but even so, the general principles underlying their compilation are the same as those of other special reports.

Note For submissions by committees the style of presentation will usually call for the replacement of the first person 'I' or 'We' by the personal third - "the Council" or "the Committee" They should be signed by all the members. The Chairman signing first, the Secretary last and the remaining members in alphabetical order of names.

Preparation

The first step in preparing a submission of any kind is to make sure you know exactly what is wanted - in other words you must be clear about your Terms of Reference.

A breakdown on the following lines is helpful at the preparatory stage:

1. What are your terms of reference? Why is the submission necessary?
2. Who are the potential readers?
3. What is their background?
4. What do they know of the subject?
5. What are your sources of information?
6. Identify those sources which you propose to use.
7. How will the submission affect readers?
8. Is it confidential or restricted in circulation?
9. What consequences may the report have?
10. What financial aspects are involved?

Sources of Information

Collecting and assembling relevant information is the foundation of all good report-writing. Information upon which one can draw when writing a report is of 3 kinds:

1. that which is recorded e.g. books, articles, journals documents, files of correspondence and so on.
2. that which is investigated e.g. through questionnaires interviews and conversations with persons who have expert knowledge or first-hand experience. These would include managers, employees, specialists, and any others whose experience and opinions have relevance to the report.
3. that which is direct i.e. through personal observation, tests and experiments.

Some submissions may be so short that the processes of collecting and organizing the data and writing the report can be performed as a single operation but at the other extreme there is the lengthy report extending to many pages that may involve spending a long time in collecting facts, grouping and interpreting them before the writer can sit down to write.

Organizing the Material

Once the material is collected, the next step is to collate it. Two procedures are involved:

1. to bring together related facts and ideas and group them into sections under definite headings.
2. to arrange the section in the order in which it is supposed to be presented.

Once collation is completed it is easy to view the situation as a whole and assess the value of its component elements. This may reveal that some of the information included is unnecessary and that other information is inadequate and needs to be reinforced.

Forms of Presentation

Letter form Short submissions may be in the form of a letter addressed to the person(s) at whose request or on whose instructions the report is made. The mechanical structure will not differ from that of the ordinary business letter but the subject heading must be included above the body of letter.

Subject matter will be arranged in the following order:

1. a reference to the request from the report
2. the methods of investigation used
3. the writer's findings
4. the conclusions drawn
5. the recommendations made, if these had been requested

In the opening paragraph brief mention will be made of the terms of reference, followed by the formal statement that the submission is being made. Then will come a statement of the sources consulted the enquiries made and any other methods used to ascertain the facts. These will be arranged in order followed by a statement of the conclusions drawn. Should the terms of reference call for recommendations, these will conclude the report.

Tabular form If a submission is lengthy a schematic arrangement in which material is classified and grouped under headings and sub-headings simplifies the readers' task who can see at a glance what the different sections are about, pass quickly over those that do not concern him and concentrate on those which do. Capitals, numerals, lettering, underscoring are all employed as devices for presenting different items with varying degrees of emphasis.

Paragraph form For very long submissions, it is sometimes better to follow the simple arrangement of paragraphs grouped under section headings.

Writing the submission

Skill in writing means ability to present subject matter clearly and in an interesting manner. In writing of submissions accuracy is paramount.

A well written submission must have the following qualities:

1. Completeness It must be complete. Everything must be investigated which falls under the terms of reference. Facts must be carefully collected, interpreted honestly and the writer must distinguish between facts and opinions. Whether the findings are favourable or otherwise the evidence of which conclusions are made must be both adequate and reliable.
2. Clarity Clear writing is the product of clear thinking. A submission will have clarity only if facts and ideas are presented in an orderly manner. The language in which it is written must be grammatically flawless but easily understood. If it is being written for a specialized field there should be no objection to using that register of language.
3. Conciseness consists in using as few words as possible to express what has to be said. The essential point is economy in the use of words. In other words bombast hackneyed expressions and circumlocation should be avoided.
4. Readability It must be readable. Nothing written will get altered if it is pedestrian. It is not enough for presentation to be clear, it must be attractive - in a form and in terms that capture attention. No written submission is of any use unless it is at least attractive enough to get a reading.

Checking the submission

Having written the submission, it should be checked carefully. The writer(s) must make sure that the information is factually unassailable, appropriately grouped and logically arranged. Spelling, grammar, and punctuation are areas for consideration. In the process of checking the writer(s) should empathize with the reader to visualize the impact of the submission.

The components of a formal submission

1. The cover. Where submission will be handled a number of times a distinctive and protective cover is needed.

2. Title page. This shows the title, the name of the person preparing the submission, the name and nearly always the position of the person to whom it is addressed, a reference number or code, and the date of completion.
3. A summary of the contents, itemizing the sections of the submission, with the page references to the right. Any appendices will be identified in a similar way.
4. An introduction, presenting the topic dealt with or the problem investigated.
5. The main body of the submission, presenting data and discussing it, with illustrative material.
6. Conclusions, evaluating the data.
7. Recommendations.
8. Appendices, supplying supplementary material, tables and charts. The page sequence in which items occur in the main report should be maintained throughout all appendices and charts.

Submission Check List

Purpose

Is the purpose of the submission made clear, more particularly as shown in the title, introduction and summary?

Information

Does the submission give all the information required by the terms of reference?

Does it meet the needs of the reader?

What questions are likely to arise in his mind?

Which of these has the report anticipated?

Has any irrelevant information been included?

Is the technical level of the information appropriate?

Introduction

Does the introduction explain the scope of the submission?

Does it define its limits?

Accuracy

Are all the statements accurate? To what degree?

Have sources and authentication been provided?

Are there any possible ambiguities?

Structure

Is the subject arranged in the appropriate logical sequence?

Is the sentence structure clear?

Are the paragraphs of reasonable length in relation to the length of the report?

Does the paragraphing reflect the development of the information and ideas?
Has the right balance been struck between the various parts of the report?
How appropriate are they?
What reference to them is made in the body of the report?
Are all the main points clearly made?

Style

Is the report free from pompous phrases and clichés?
Is the approach positive rather than negative?
Does it hold the interest of the writer himself throughout his re-reading of it?

Display

Is there reasonable economy of paper and expression?
Are conclusions and recommendations arranged neatly and clearly?
Are the various sections summarized sufficiently for the reader?
Are the headings and sub-headings right?
Have visual aids been introduced where appropriate?

Language

Is the report free from grammatical errors?
Is the vocabulary too abstract?
Are any meaningless phrases introduced?
Is the pace the right one? Too fast? Too slow?
Is the report trying to accomplish too much?
Is the tone adopted towards the reader the right one?

Illustrative matter

Does each diagram convey its meaning clearly?
How well is the association between text and illustration established?
Do the illustrations give the essential minimum of explanatory wording?
Are the tables used mentioned in the text of the report?

The effect

Is the survey of the subject matter concise?
Has the purpose been achieved?
Can one describe in some detail how it has been achieved?
Has the draft been thoroughly edited?
Is the writer reasonably satisfied with the report?