Let's Write the Right Way: Exploring Writing Skills for Students of Technological Institutes

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In today's world effective communication is the key to success. It holds true in each and every discipline. As we know, communication involves multiple skills. Both verbal and non-verbal communications have their own specific importance in producing effective communication. Formal communication relies a lot on the writing skills compared to speaking and listening ones. Technical writing is remarkably different from other forms of formal writings like literary and other genre specific writings. The basic purpose of writing defines the technique and method to be adopted while writing. Engineers have to indulge in a lot of writing, documentation and presentations. Preparing reports is also one of the major duties of all involved in the field of technology. Most of the writing involved is factual and so it has to be more precise and accurate compared to non-technical writings. The language has semantic as well as syntactic differences. The construction of the sentences also has to be very particular, for example the tense involved has to some times be simple past tense or at times past perfect. Objectivity is essential to attain desired communication impact.

Content Matters

- In any writing, content is the key to effective communication. The writer has to be very particular about what s/he writes.
- The writer should focus on one particular area and not include many points as this will reduce the effectiveness and create confusion.

- An impressive writer would begin by listing out the points in a rough draft, so that when the report or article is finally written, none of the points are missed out.

- Making notes will help the writers in creating a pattern and outline for the presentation.

- If there are tables and charts, they too have to be meaningful and accurate both in its outcome and content.

Preparing the Drafts

- Preparing the draft is also a very important aspect of writing.

- The rough notes and ideas should be elaborated in a coherent and meaningful manner.

- References should be listed to avoid risk of plagiarism.

- Short and grammatically sound sentences should be formed for effective communication.

- The paragraphs should be aligned logically and sequentially.

- Graphs and tables should be placed in the proper order and at the right place.

- Technical jargon can be added to enhance the impact and to improve the communicative value of the piece but over indulgence of the same can sometimes create a negative impact.

- Rewrite if necessary.

Tenses in Technical Writing

- Tenses matter even in technical writing as it creates the desired impact.

- Past tense should be used when there is an attempt to prove that earlier research is no longer relevant and now new research has been undertaken in the recent work and is going to be proved during the course of the article.

- Past perfect tense is generally used when the author wishes to improve upon what has been earlier said on the relevant topic.

- Present tense suggests that the findings of your research or argument are true for now and immediate future.

Use of Verb Form in Technical Writing

- Do not use many "to be" verbs like, 'is', 'was', 'has been', 'have been' as it makes the presentation heavy in the wrong way. It takes away the tentative aspect of technical writing.

- Use modal auxiliary verbs like 'may', 'might', 'could', 'would' etc.

- Avoid strong verbs as it takes away the scientific quality of the technical research.

- Use verbs like 'appears', 'attempts', 'indicates' etc. as they make the readers feel valuable enough to disagree with the findings of the work.

Active Voice or Passive Voice

- Active voice is generally preferred in technical writing as it is more straight forward compared to passive voice.

- Passive voice lends a kind of objectivity to the report or findings of an article but make it a little more unnatural.

- Active voice gives the writing a kind of authenticity and subjectivity that is missing in passive voice.

- Passive voice is sometimes needed to make the writing more objective.

Write Objectively

- Objectivity is extremely important element of technical writing.

- The writer has to be objective, as s/he has to substantiate his/her findings of the research done.

- Technical writing has to face scrutiny in the present as well as in the future and so it has to be objective.

- The writer should avoid pronouns like 'I', 'My', 'They', etc.

- Technical writing is a form of writing that has to be creative at the same time accurate. So the writer has to balance between the method of presentation and objectivity of the content.

- Results of the research or the report matter and so they have to be presented objectively.

- Objectivity lends scope for improvement in the future both by the author as well as future researchers.

Analysis Sustains Argument

- In technical writing, analysis is the key to convince the audience of the seriousness and authenticity of the work.

- Analyze giving scientific measures and examples to sustain your argument. Technological innovations have to be scientifically justified, as there is less scope of error in technological writing compared to writing in other disciplines.

- By using words like 'appears', 'suggests', 'indicates' tentativeness is created which makes the writing open ended and acceptable.

Designing the Presentation

- Use Times New Roman as the font for the presentation. If it is a power-point presentation, the fonts can be experimented with.

- The title of any presentation should be written in 14-font size and it should be written in Bold. The rest of the presentation should be written in 12 font size

- The name and affiliation of the author should be written in 10-font size and the email id should be in 9-font size.

- The title page should be designed in accordance to the desired medium of presentation. If the article is to be published in a journal or a magazine then the title page should have just the title of the article and the author details. But if it is a class or Seminar presentation then the title page can be designed more informally.

- Follow either APA or MLA style of writing.

- Use correct grammar and also use spell check before the final draft is finalized.

- Consult your supervisor for the correct presentation style, as it is different for different purposes.

- Punctuations are extremely important in writing. It is necessary to maintain clarity and comprehensibility of the work.

- Correct order of words also makes meaningful sentences.

- Coherence is also an integral part of writing.

Documentation and References

- Documentation and References are extremely important in today's research scenario.

- Past research aids a writer in presenting his/her ideas and thought by creating a base for the argument. But it is mandatory to create a Reference list of all the authors referred to.

- Documentation is as essential as references. Within the presentation the writer has to document whatever references s/he utilizes.

- Paraphrasing is allowed if you cite the source. But that too is allowed only to a certain extent; you cannot create an entire presentation with the help of someone else's idea.

Intellectual Property Rights and Plagiarism

- Intellectual Property Rights are laws that are to be followed by all writers. It gives copyright to the authors to protect the misuse of their intellectual property.

- Plagiarism is strictly prohibited and it rarely forgiven. To quote from MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (7th Edition), "Students exposed as plagiarists may suffer severe penalties, ranging from failure in the assignment or in the course to expulsion from school".

- Proper parenthetical information and documentation helps the writer avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism.

Tables and Diagram

- The placement of tables and diagrams should be in the correct order so that the reader is able to locate the connections between the two.
- Label tables above and figures below so that the information is read in the correct order and coherence is maintained.
- Be very accurate about the content and intention of any given table or diagram.
- Use words like "as shown in the table", "the details are shown in the table", etc.

Creating a written document is an art. There are small as well as big details that one needs to take care while writing in technological field. Writing is a very large part of communication skills, as one has to write not only within the firm or institute but they have to communicate with clients, colleagues, suppliers, distributors etc. They have to write reports, proposals, contracts, manuals and even business related letters, which require a precise format and accuracy in all aspects of writing. The above points provide a framework around which the writer can create a work of art.

The best way to achieve the desired communicative impact is through the use of three essential ingredients:

1) Making notes
2) Creating first draft
3) Redrafting

If these three stages are adhered to then the desired impact is sure to happen and the document created will be technically and grammatically precise.

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