Soft Skills
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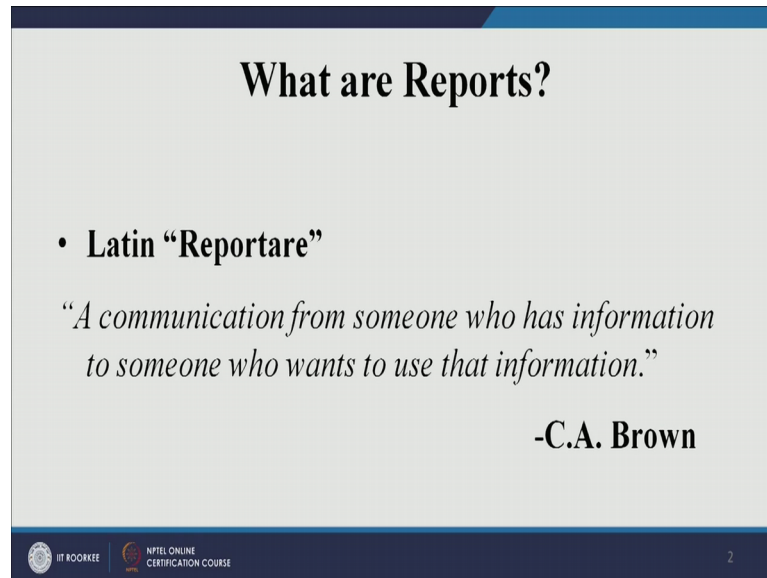
Lecture – 31
Report Writing

Good morning, welcome once again to the online lectures on Soft Skills. As we remember presently, we are dealing with the writing section. And in previous lectures, we have discussed on various types of writing that an individual as a professional comes across in his day-to-day lives. Today, we are going to discuss one very important segment of writing skills and that is report writing. The question that may often wonder you is as a professional why exactly do you need to know the art of report writing, what actually are reports, and how should one plan to write a report.

The word report you may come across everyday in your lives; whenever the word report you come across, you start thinking of so many reports that you have either heard or you have come across. Imagine, you are going to buy a car, you are going to join a course, or some of you who are professionals in an organization, they are actually waiting either for their promotion or for a new increment, some of them who have applied for jobs and they are waiting for their interview calls. All of you will come to know that all these discussions actually help in enabling people to come to a decision, whether it is to get an interview call or to get a promotion or to launch a new product, all these are based on the reports.

Now, what exactly are reports, how this term has been derived, and what are the various specifications of a report, we shall be discussing very minutely, and in a very elaborate manner. Now, the word report derives from the Latin word reportare. Let us try to analyze this word reportare. And once you come to know the meaning of this term, you will also be able to understand what report can be. The word report had its origin in the Latin term reportare, which is a combination of two words re and portare. Re actually means to send, and portare comes from the word porter. So, the exact meaning of this word is to carry something to a person who is not present at the particular time. So, report actually means a sort of information or carrying a sort of information to somebody

by someone and that is why report is a sort of communication. We have already discussed a lot about communication.
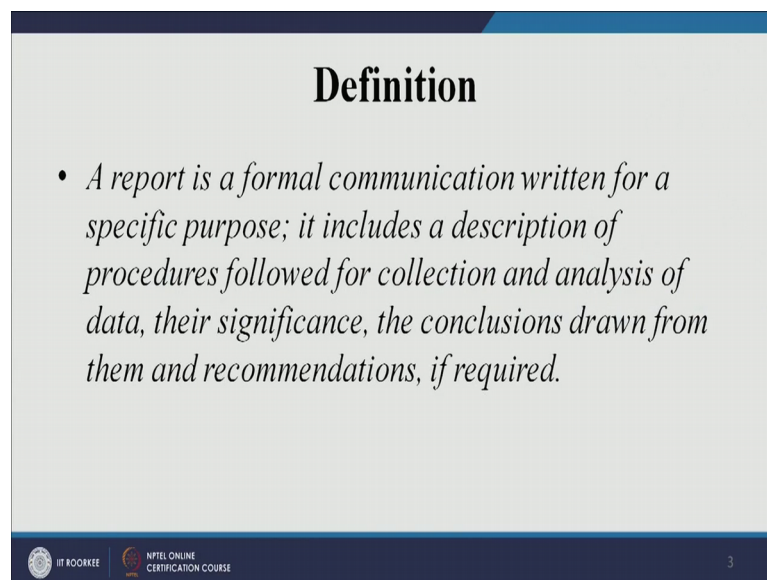
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And thus a report can be considered a communication from someone who has information, and this information he passes to someone who wants to use that information. Now, all of us are leaving in a world of information, things keep on changing, policies keep changing, there are new policies, new products being launched in the market. Sometimes certain things, which are already in the market; and we want some new changes in that that also will be based on actually the recommendations of a report. Imagine, any new policy even today, which actually comes into force that comes only after much consideration by a committee, by a team. And what does that team do, the team actually takes into consideration all important pieces of information, and then finally, the team members look at all the pros and cons and then they come to a conclusion.

Now, this is what are the specifications of a report. Now, another thing that you may attain ask yourself is how then can a report can be defined. Suppose, somebody in your family is ill, and you go to a doctor because you want to know what caused that illness. So, what the doctor does, the doctor actually sends you for a medical examination, and these are either in the forms of an x-ray or in the forms of certain tests and when the reports come the doctor tells, you that this is actually the reason that you are suffering

from such an element. So, what I intend to say is that a report is actually a sort of investigation, it is a sort of examination; and based on that examination, the result that we come across that enables us to take some decision or take some solution.

Hence, a report can be defined as a formal communication written for a specific purpose. Now, here when somebody is ill, you actually want to know what caused that element, so that is the specific purpose; and for that purpose you go to a specific personnel, maybe he is a doctor, sometimes it is the nurse, that also can tell you. So, all these people what they do is they actually look at the various processes, various pieces of information, and then they finally, arrive at a solution. So, it is written for a specific purpose, it includes a description of procedures.
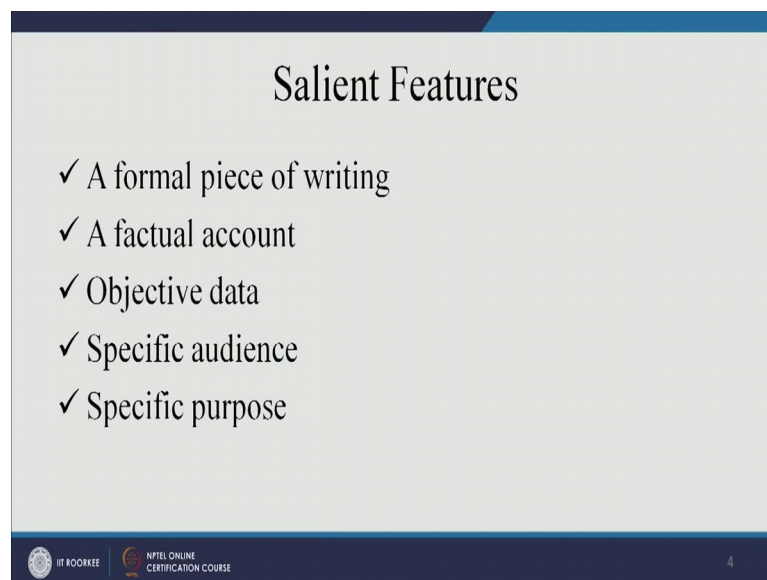
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So, all these procedures, I mean suppose there are certain tests the doctor recommends not only in the case of doctors, but even in some other cases also. I mean you see the course that you are undergoing the lectures that you are listening that also might have been the result which might have come out of a series of procedures. I mean that is why after such a report, a recommendation might have been there that let there be online lectures and now you all listening to it. So, any action that is taken for specific purpose and then for a specific audience even, it includes description of procedures followed for collection and analysis of data.

So, when you take a test when you gave a test, so what are there are various procedures and all these procedures they actually help you gather or collect the data. And that data is interpreted, the doctor will interpret the various sorts of data and then finally, you will arrive at a solution. You will reach a conclusion. And the conclusion drawn from them and recommendation see if required. Suppose the doctor is not satisfied with the result or the doctor wants to have a sort of comparative result or comparative analysis, he may also refer you or refer the patient to some another doctor or sometimes for some other you know expertise, even in that case also he will rely on the data that he gets. So, ultimately something that is very important of a report is data.

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So, there is certain keywords that we come across, which also will tell us the salient features or the attributes of a report. Now, we can see that a report is a formal piece of writing. Now, here some point of caution is very important that whenever you communicate, you communicate not only formally, but you communicate even informally. For example, two friends talking to each other that may be informal, but an employee discussing certain things with his boss that will come under formal category. And if that is written specifically for a purpose that will become a formal piece of writing.

Suppose a new product is going to be launched. So, for that first you want to understand the needs of the customer the satisfaction level of the customer, there are other products

in the market, the qualities of the other product and then you also would like to know why are the deficiencies in your product. You would also try to ensure that you can provide something new, but all these will be based on the result that you come across or that you reach after doing a lot of analysis. So, all these will be written in a very formal manner.

So, the first attribute of a report is that it is a formal piece of writing. Moreover, it is factual. When a test is recommended either with the help of machines or with the help of say talking to people, understanding your market trends, whatsoever, but then it is a factual writing. A report is a factual writing, data makes it factual you cannot supply the wrong data, you cannot provide the wrong information because it is said that a report is actually the hallmark or the report is the bread and butter of an organization in so far as when the organization has to take a decision.

So, when somebody is going to write a report what he or she is supposed to do is to make everything very specific so that the decision that will be taken it may either make or mark the fortune both of the organization as well as of an individual. So, the data has to be very objective, and audience also when you write the report, everyone cannot enjoy a report, everyone cannot understand a report that is why when somebody is going to write a report, he or she should know who will be the audience. When you know the audience, it is often said that if two people they know each other, the communication level between the two will become very smooth, it will become you know very easy to understand.

But then when there are two people who are strangers to each other, they do not know each other's background, hence when something is written specifically for a business purpose, specifically for official purpose, what happens is it is actually the language that matters. So, two people in the same organization, they understand each other background and they are also familiar with the sort of vocabulary with the sort of language that is being used that is why we have at times repeatedly said that a communication between two doctors can become very smooth. But a communication between an engineer and a doctor, because you know both of them will be using the terms which are familiar or which are often used in their day-to-day work place or in their day to day work style.

So, naturally when you know your audience, the task becomes easier. You do not need to explain everything to a computer professionals. So, if you are also computer professional

and you are talking about the certain problem naturally some of the words that you will pick and choose and select and write will be known by the other person. But suppose you are writing it for a non computer person for a non-technical person naturally, he would expect a lot of description because there are certain terms which he may not know.

Then the specific purpose, when you write a report you have a purpose. We will discuss later how because you do not write report all of a sudden. You know it is not like that you got up and you decided you should write a report, it never happens like this. Of course, in some other forms of writing, you may suppose you have to write a letter, even there also you want to understand the purpose why you are writing this. So, likewise when you are going to write a report, moreover at times when you are writing an informal letter, you may think of writing a letter to your friend. So, that you may decide, but you cannot decide writing a report by yourself, unless and until the need be that is why what makes it quite important here is that a report is written only when it is required.

Next is that whenever you write a report, a report is not like something you know a piece of paper. It is not a confined to a piece of paper or only to one page writing maybe depending upon the nature of the report, depending upon the need of our, also depending upon the frequency of report, the lengths of the reports may vary. But then it has to be well organized it is not like that you will start from anywhere and you will end anywhere it that is why it is it is systematic, it is well organized. There has to be procedure as to what should come first, what should come next, where should the discussion be when to conclude, whether to give the recommendation or not fine. Then whenever somebody writes a report or keep yourself in the position of a reader, who is going to read a report.

So, as a reader you feel, when you start reading the report you will find that when you start reading, after one or two pages you find that suddenly the topic has changed. So, what happens, you will find it is it is not worth readable because it has already blocked your flow of reading, it actually blocks the flow of thinking of the reader as well. So, there needs to be a sort of unity and a sort of coherence. By unity and coherence what I mean is if you start with one particular topic, you are actually suppose the sentence begins with a topic sentence, the other sentences should also be linked to the first sentence. So, I mean there has to be a sort of united effort and then one paragraph should cohere with the other paragraph; otherwise, it will appear like fragmented we do not want, nobody wants to read a fragmented piece of writing. Because when you are

reading something specifically a report you know that a report is a solution to a problem, a report is written in response to a problem.

So, naturally you would like as a reader you would like that there should be a smooth flow. And at times when the information appears to be a bit say complex, appears to be a bit cumbersome it appears to be a little bit difficult naturally what the report writer can do is in order to explain in order to make things more explicit he will provide some illustrations. These illustrations will be in various shapes as we shall discuss when we discuss the structure of the report how a chart or a graph or a pie chart or a (Refer Time: 18:22) or a table how it these illustrations can make things very clear. I mean the graphic details they actually make things more explanatory that is why it is very important to provide illustrations in the report.

And then all of you will find that a report has to be bound properly, I mean it is not the pages, which are scattered, which are just flattering. So, since it is systematic, it will follow a proper sequence. We will discuss in this structure how you know first you would expect that there should be a cover page; and on the cover page, you would also expect that it should have the proper title of the report, and then naturally depending upon the sequence all the other items of the report should be properly followed. So, these are the salient attributes of the report these are the special features of the report.

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Objectives

- To update progress
- To produce result in written forms
- To guide
- To spread information

Now, another question that that may occur in your mind is what actually are the objectives of the report what can a report do. All of you who are either working in an organization or you are trying to get into an organization will come to know suppose you are applying for a particular organization. So, before you go for the interview, you want to know a lot about the organization, but how do you come to know about it. You actually go to their website; and on their website, you have all sorts of details. So, now all these details they are actually put there in the form of a report in the form of a communication.

Now, what did this report or this piece of information do to you, benefit to you it actually updated, it told you about the progress. So, the main objective of a report is to update the progress of the organization. Update the progress you know even you know it is not confined only to organizations, even for yourselves also. If you want to see your own progress that also can be done through a report, I mean you can evaluate yourself.

So, another task of a report is to evaluate. Suppose, you take the data of five years and you want to know that in 2011, this was the progress and you want to know it today. So, how will you come to know, you have to look at the data and the progress of all these 4 years. So, that will provide you not only a sort of say comparative analysis, which will help you provide you a comparative analysis. But then you can also understand the trends, suppose trends of employment, trends of people living a particular organization and that is why if any organization wants to bring certain things new or change certain policies that also will result on the basis of these evaluations.

Moreover, things may go wrong in organizations, things also go wrong in our own lives. So, in order to bring the organization to the right path or certain deadlines are there. So, again in order that such a deadline may not occur time and again what the organization does is the organization will formulate a committee of several people and these people will be asked to understand the problem. So, in order to understand the problem, what these people will do, they will actually look at the data and then finally, they will come up with certain conclusions. And based on these conclusions the organization will also take some action.

So, another attribute or another objective of a report is to guide the organization to a corrective path. I mean as I said earlier that during critical hours, it becomes quite
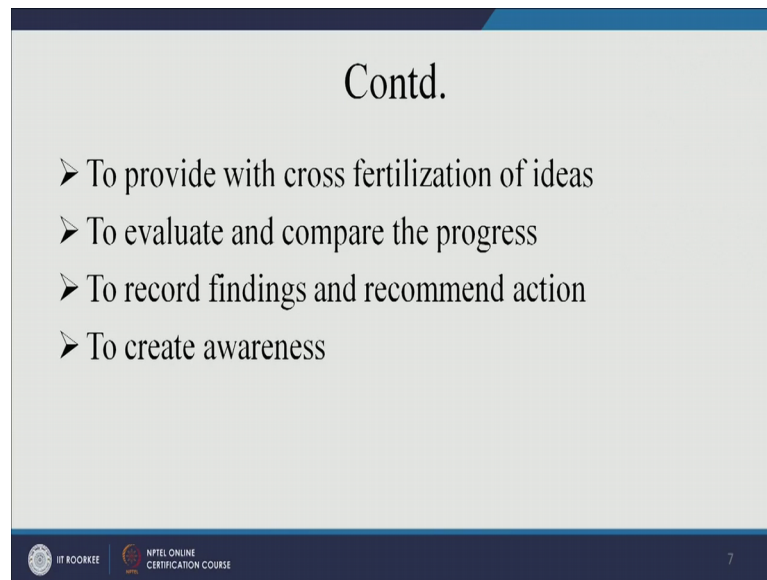
mandatory to understand the problem and take certain steps that may help us avoid some untoward incidents. Moreover it is actually a report that spreads information working in an organization as an internal member you know so many things, but there are other things also you need to understand. And moreover, it is only through a report that other people will come to know about your organization about a particular organization.

So, one of the main ingredients of a report is to spread information not only internally, but also externally. You will find that every organization will have certain stakeholders, share holder so many and all these people from time to time they would like to know the progress and this is possible only with the help of report. Moreover, when the reports are written you also come to know, how ideas are cross-fertilize. Sometimes suppose a fire broke out in an organization and or a company met a severe loss, again there will be a committee will try to understand what maybe the adequate remedies based on the regions and for that in order to find out all these a report has to be written.

With the help of the report, they will also come to know there were certain gaps in reigning sometimes it. So, happens that we do not understand the gaps in reigning in thought process we actually fell to analyze the needs and expectations of our customers and that is why we take such a decision that may affect the working of an organization. Hence, a reports main objective is also to understand cross-fertilization of ideas to compare the progress, and all these reports because repots are in the written form we will also discuss how there can be variety of reports the types of reports.

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So, but then in a written form, a report actually records the findings and then recommends action while discussing, while taking about the definition of the report we have said that a report is based on the data. And what that data does, the data actually is analyzed in order to reach the conclusion. But then this conclusion maybe based only on the data available an intelligent report writer, a diligent report writer, a subtle report writer, a careful report writer he will also if they need be I mean you are asked to recommend you know some to give certain recommendations. So, in the recommendations you can mention what can be done or in order to avoid such a catastrophe or such a deadlock. A report also helps in creating awareness.

You will find that in your organization there are some colleagues who get very fast promotions and you do not get a promotion. Now, here is the time to make an analysis of yourself, and also you can make an analysis based on the comparison of yours with your fellow colleague. And when you compare the progress of both of yours, you will find that there were certain things which you lacked in, and the other person had it and that is perhaps the reason of his being promoted. So, it not only ensures awareness among people, but it also ensures self awareness, you can make your own appraisal also. And based on that I mean based on the result you can based on the findings you can also take certain steps that will help you in making yourself eligible for a promotion, for a hike.

Now, is there any difference between report writing that we are giving so much emphasis to because there are other forms of writing also. We have talked about letter writings previously. Now, let us see how is report writing different from literary writing. You know somebody reads a book by Chethan Bhagat or somebody reads a book by (Refer Time: 27:35), somebody reads a book by some other writer. So, if you compare a literary writing with report writing, you will come across several differences. As we have discussed a report cannot be written, because you feel like writing it. A report can only be written based on the demand.

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Differences between Report Writing & Literary Writing

Technical Reports	Literary Writings
Written on demand	Written on one's own initiative
Specific Audience	Audience not assured
Fixed Structure	No fixed structure
Objective in approach	Subjective in approach

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So, a report is written on the in response to a demand, but a literary writing is written on one's own initiative. You get up in the morning and you see the clouds, beautiful clouds, blue clouds maybe they are going to bring rains. So, this actually makes you feel literary and you feel like writing it, but this is not the case with report writing.

Moreover, a literary writing does not have fixed audience, the same book may be read by you, it may be ready by your friends, by your relatives, even by your fathers forefathers the same book I mean there is no categorization of audience. But when you are writing a report you will find it is written for a specific audience, since it is need best, it has got a specific purpose that is why not only the audiences vary, but the purposes also vary. There is no fixed structure of any literary writing. A poem maybe of 14 lines, another
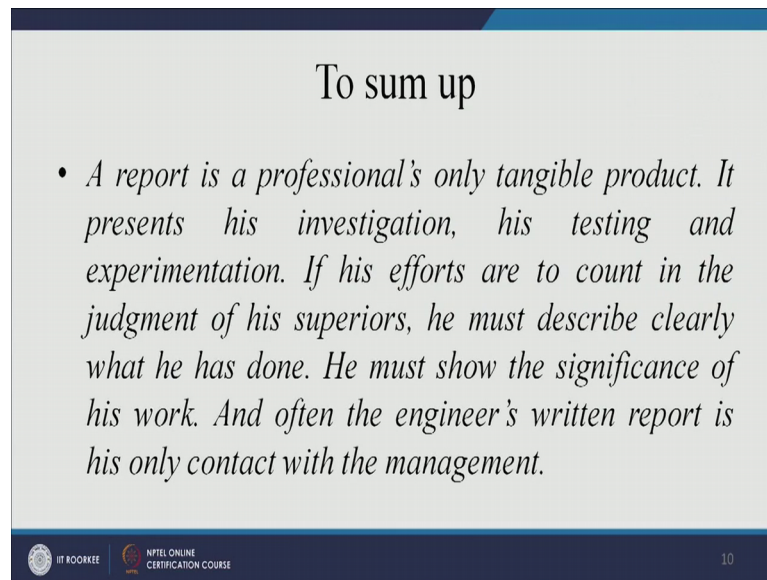
poem maybe of 20 lines a book may go up to 100 pages, another book may go up to 200 pages. But for a report you actually have a fixed structure.

When I say fixed structure what I mean is it should have a proper beginning it should have a proper discussion, it should have a proper end. Moreover, the findings that you have come across that should also have something to support because your report and the results of your report has to be logical, because there has to be some conclusion that is why a report writing is very objective in approach, whereas a literary writing is very subjective in terms of its approach.

As regards language also you have to be very particular. The language of a report has to be very plain very simple you cannot make use of say all the literary devices and making your language very cumbersome, putting a lot of figures of speech putting a lot of exaggerations no. Since, it is objective, it has to be straight to the point written in a very matter of facts style. When you read a report, the basic aim is to derive some information, but when you read a literary piece of word, the main aim is to derive pleasure. So, when you watch a play, when you read a play, watch a movie and when you read a novel, so you feel a sort of satisfaction, I mean this satisfaction is not expected of a report. There only you need information as to how it happen, what action can be taken, but based on a literary writing you are not supposed to do all these things.

So, the purposes are varied. So, it is quite mandatory to understand the differences between the two forms of writing, because you know report writing in some way or the other, it has to be confined to certain rules and regulations. Whereas, a literary writing has a sort of autonomy, I mean a literary writing has got a sort of spontaneity, it actually flows, but you will find in a report writing, you have certain things where and there are several sections in it. When we talk about the report structure, we will find how these structures differentiate a report from other forms of writing. And the element of formality that is also very mandatory.

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Before we conclude let us say let us see this observation, where it is said that a report is a professionals only tangible product. Now, why tangible product, because a report writing involves not only investigation and testing, but it also in involves a person's evaluation of a particular problem, a comparison of problem and then it presents his investigation his testing and experimentation. If his efforts are to count in the judgment of his superiors, we will we will discuss in a later lectures, how your report read by different people may have different reactions, because the audience of your report or the people to whom your report will go may react at differently.

Now, there also comes into question how the relationship between the two people is because when an action is going to take place on the basis of the findings and the results of your report, it is quite important that this action is going to affect some people some people in the organization, and moreover particularly an organization. So, a report writer must describe clearly what he has done, clarity not only of a report, but of all business communications is the hallmark is the secret. He must show I mean the report writer must show the significance of his work. And often the engineers or say for that matter any professionals written report is his only contact with the management. So, when you write a report you are not only showing your linguistic ability rather you are also showing your faculty of reigning, your scientific attitude your grasp over the subject your intelligence and your initiative.

Dear friends, in the lecture that we will follow, we will talk about the types of reports. And I do hope that this introductory lecture on report will prepare you to write reports in a very careful manner, because a report not only makes, but marks the fortune of an individual as well as of an organization.

Thank you.