**Soft Skills**
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Lecture - 37
Structure of Reports Part II

Welcome back. In the previous lecture, we talked about the structure of report and while discussing the structure, we discussed the first part of the report structure that is prefatorial material of front matter. Having understood the front matter it is time now, we understood the main parts of the report. When you start the building, you lay the foundation and then you start making it brick by brick. So, when the foundation is over, we want to see how the wall comes up. So, the discussion of the report is actually the mirror of the report.

Now, what are the elements of discussion and what should be the part of discussion?

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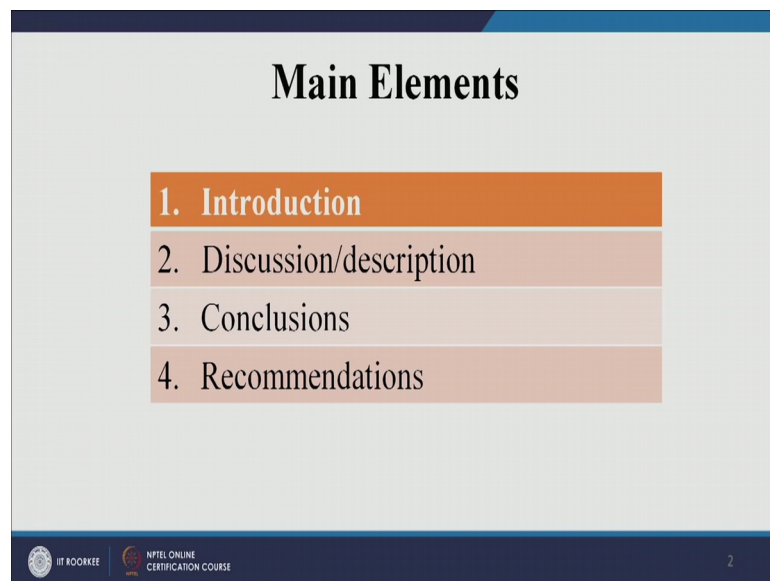
As we said earlier that the main elements of the report are introduction, then discussion, then conclusions and recommendations, meaning thereby that the main body of the report has got 4 parts and the first part is introduction. Suppose you are going to write a report on a particular topic; on a particular subject, your readers would like to know what the problem is about because the front part of the report is nothing, but the structure the real report begins with the main body and with the introduction.

So, in introduction; there are certain parts which have to be taken into consideration every problem before the problem is to be analyzed. The reader is actually interested to know; what is the background of the problem; what is actually going to happen and then if something is going to happen; how it is going to happen because while discussing the data collection, we talked about and then the data has to be analyzed and that will be done in the discussion part.

Now, the introductory part of a report or the main body of the report has certain items which actually require proper understanding. First is a historical background; you need to understand the historical background of the problem and through this statement of authorization.

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As we have been saying that while you go through the terms of reference, the problem is mentioned in the terms of reference and in the light of the terms of reference and in the light of the authorization, you actually start your report. So, first you are going to provide your readers with the background of the matter.

Suppose, you are going to talk about pollution air pollution; suppose, you are going to talk about a particular organization where you are going to talk about the absenteeism or in a particular observation; organization, you are going to talk about the use of technology and all naturally, you need to prove because you know no reports can be written unless and until there is a problem because every report say for that matter a

technical report is a solution to a problem or will provide a solution to a problem. So, while you provide the background in the background itself, you are going to talk about not only about the organization, but also about the problem.

Suppose, somebody is going to write a report on unemployment problem in such and such sector. So, he will have to provide the brief introduction about that sector say in a technology sector or say in some other sector in automobile industry whatsoever. So, you will provide a background of the matter and then the hypothesis, I mean the concept the problem; why this; how this problem occurred and now what actually needs to be done; all these have been provided to you in the terms of reference by the person who has assigned you the task of writing the report.

Then, you also need to mention the scope of the problem; suppose you are talking about a problem; you also need to talk about how it is going to affect the people of that locality; the employees of that organization or the particular community because you are going to talk about a problem in a particular organization or in a community; naturally you also need to talk about this scope. Moreover remember since you are going to give a solution to the problem in the report and while you are collecting the data; do you think that the data that you have collected and the report that you have prepared can be applied to everyone or does it have certain limitations.

So, while you are collecting the data; maybe you came across certain hindrances or challenges or whatsoever. So, in introduction itself; in the introduction of the report itself; you are going to talk about not only the methodology of the data, but then you will also I mean whatever way you had the method of data collection or the way you collected the data, but in every method, there is some amount of limitation like that in every solution; there may be some amount of limitation. So, you will also talk about the limitations of the report because maybe the findings that you have made cannot be applicable to all.

So, hence you need to mention the limitations, then comes the sources and the methods of data collection, you remember while we are discussing the a methods of data collection, we had talked about observation as one of the method, then we also talked about the telephonic interview, we also talked about personal interview and then the questionnaire, but what is of a main significance is that not every method of data
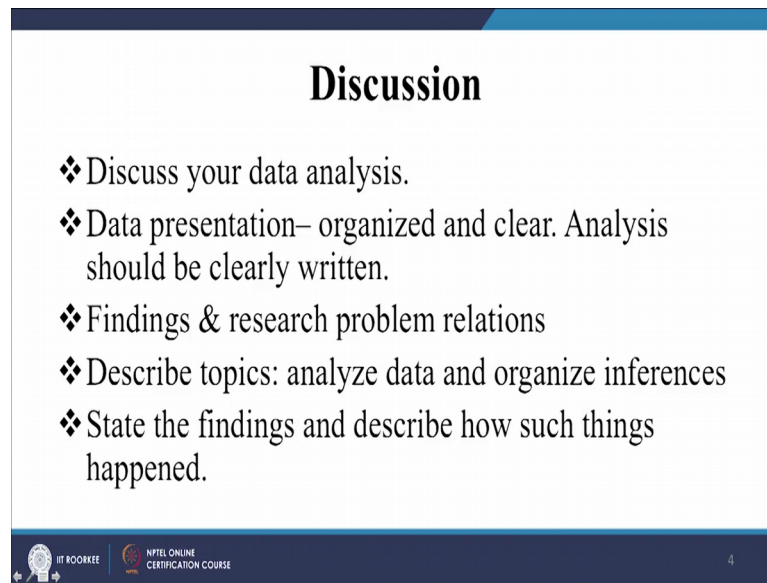
collection is a one way which suits every audience or every problem because you cannot say that this is the final solution maybe because of certain limitations or had there been no limitations the report could have been somehow different.

Hence you not only mention the sources by which and through which you collected the data and the method you applied for the data collection, then when you write the report you will find that you will come across certain technical terms and when the report is complete and if you are going to revise it and read it you will find that certain technical terms may be difficult for people who do not belong to that particular area or field for which you have written the report. But then since your report can be read by anyone and everyone wisdom says that you should provide the definition of certain terms because the person who is going to take an action or the boss who ultimately understands the solution that you have provided may not be a person having the experience in the area in which you have written the report.

So, if some amount of explanation is provided through definition of certain terms perhaps, it will become easier, the task of reading the report will become easier and then finally, the report preview. So, if you keep into consideration all these elements in certain reports a people also mentioned even in the introduction the division of the report, the report is divided into these sections, the first section talks about this the second talks about this and this.

So, when introduction formulates the first part of your a main body of the report next to the introduction, what is of utmost importance is discussion.

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Now, if introduction paves the way to the reading of the report it is actually the discussion where the entire drama takes place meaning is the entire data which you have collected. Now there is an analysis of the data that is why; when you make an analysis and if it is a technical report, you will find the data collected by you requires proper analysis because unless and until you analyze it, you interpret it, people will not understand because it is your interpretation and your analysis which will help you in a very sequential manner in a very logical manner reach the conclusion of your report.

So, it is here in the discussion part, but remember as I had said earlier that your report begins with and you have to number the items of the report. So, your introduction will be a number one and from discussion, it will be you can you can put to discussion and in discussion, there will be further divisions every item you know because there will be a several sections in the discussion itself. So, you will divide them and you will follow the decimal numbering here, you have the liberty to analyze your data; the data has been gathered and presented, but a proper analysis of the data; you actually want to make your readers understand the real problem and then why this problem came up; what do the data say about this; how you can also show through your data by interpreting and evaluating how a particular trend emerges all these are very important.

So, you are going to provide a proper analysis and in a very clear manner you know why; when I say clear manner; I am also aware of the language that you will use of course, we

will talk about language use in a separate section and then in the discussion itself. You will be talking about the findings the research problem, their relations with the sort of discussion which you are making and when you are analyzing the data, you are actually because it is a sort of interpretation and it is a sort of analysis which is actually paving you to reach any conclusion because your conclusion the conclusion of your report will totally be based on the analysis that you have made.

Say for example, you are talking about the problem of absenteeism in an organization or in an institute imagine, there may be several regions, but unless and until you have the data, you cannot analyze that people may very casually say that since they are not sincere, they become absent, but then when you analyze it and when the data with you are available you may understand that some people may have a personal problem. Then you may also understand that some people actually do not like the unit in which they are working again you may also find that some people do not go well with their bosses because of the a sort of communication pattern in his unit or her unit again, there may be variety of regions, but all these regions, you will only be able to understand when you will have the data and you have a chance to interpret them.

So, once you have interpreted the data and analyzed that you are nearing a sort of inference or you are nearing a sort of conclusion. So, you have to state the findings and describe. So, when you are describing you may also feel at times that they can be done in a tabular manner; actually, they can also be done through the use of illustration for example, suppose you are working on the data of ten years. So, in order to show the comparative trend in order to show a comparative analysis through graphs through charts or through a some other drawings you can show that and moreover it is beneficial for those people who actually run short of time.

They will simply look at the graph and the chart and they will try to understand because you know visuals work more than the verbal's and that is why it is, but remember when you are putting those visuals they should actually be in line or in sync with the discussion that you are making now the way you are interpreting and analyzing your data of course, in informative report this is not that possible. But when it is an analytical report or a report which actually requires a lot of interpretation then you not only raise questions, but you also answer.

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But how do you answer you answer with the help of the data available. So, you answer the problem statements and finally, by making a lot of interpretation and analysis, you are actually trying to bring the discussion to a close so, but before you bring it to a close you actually see that it is not something that is imagined or not something that has come out of a proposition. Rather, it is actually based on a logic or based on a fact otherwise your conclusion may appear to be lopsided and it will simply show that you have not done any interpretation or any finding rather you have simply come concluded.

But when you conclude please see draw the logical inferences and judgments based on the analysis it is here some people simply understand that they have to write the conclusion. But the conclusion that they feel no the conclusion should be totally based on the analysis which has been made no new information should be there in the conclusion. The conclusion actually should provide what you have gathered from the data after a lot of your interpretation evaluation reasoning and whatsoever and when you are doing all these and when you have reached the conclusion. Now you have one thing to take into consideration as is how to write the conclusion you see if your report is say of a 30 pages.
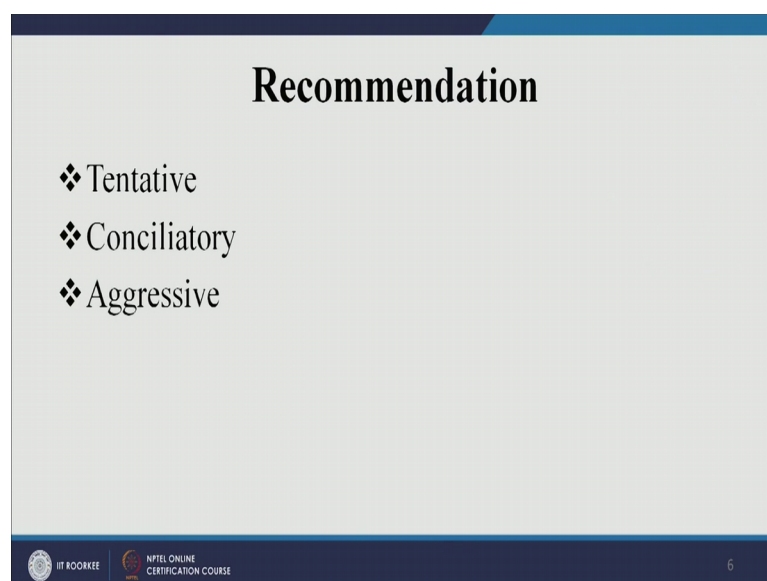
But conclusion that you are writing; going to write is conclusion should be very brief; maybe it is of one page may be conclusion either of 2 pages, but it has been seen that since people are running sort of time they have so many commitments, they many busy

professionals have often said that they simply want to see the conclusions and they say they also want to see the illustrations which are there in the report. So, when you are going to conclude, you can also prefer to write the conclusion in a very succinct manner, but then let all these conclusions be mocked, maybe it is not possible to provide the conclusion in a paragraph the conclusions can be numbered also, but when you are giving the conclusion see to it that your conclusion is totally based on the analysis which has been made.

Now, again one thing that you can ask after you have provided the conclusion; is it actually required that you should provide the recommendation. Now, once again go back to the definition of the report where we said that it is a formal statement. It is actually a formal piece of writing where an analysis of data is done to come to the conclusion, but in order to write the recommendation, you cannot give the recommendation on your own unless and until you have been asked to give the recommendation it is better not to give the recommendation.

But even if you feel or even if you are asked to give the recommendation, there are 3 ways you can write the recommendation; I mean tentative; tentative means that based on this a conclusion; you are providing a recommendation which may appear to be feasible sometimes, there are people who give the recommendations which are not feasible.

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Recommendation

❖ Tentative
❖ Conciliatory
❖ Aggressive

So, do not go to recommend such action which cannot be completed. Some people give the recommendation where they say that this can be the only solution you know while writing the recommendation. Of course, there is a no you know personality should not come in and between both in the conclusion as well as in the recommendation you are recommending an action based on what has happened in that report.

So, it provides a solution; it provides a sort of conciliation to the recommendation, but there are some people who actually give the recommendation which appears to be very aggressive, maybe they can when they suggest an action they say that it is very important it is actually without this it cannot be done. So, you are of course, you have the liberty to give the recommendation, but see to it that when you recommend your recommendation should have some amount of feasibility because based on your recommendation some action will be taken and if you simply jump to the conclusion and to the recommendation which is an invention of your own naturally the report as a communication will fail.

So, while recommending an action please see that you maintain a sort of equilibrium where you are providing the truth, but you are recommending actions that are feasible also. Now having done the main body of the report; what is of importance is to understand that a report does not have only the front matter and the main body, but a report also has back matter. Now the question is what exactly should come in the back matter and what are the various items that should formulate back matter; when you are writing the report; you will find because when you write the report you write in a way where you want to provide all sorts of analysis all sorts of interpretation and evaluation and all.

But there are certain points which you may feel that that can block the flow of the readers thoughts say for example, you have collected the data and you have collected the data with the help either of a questionnaire or a personal interview and so, when you are discussing and it you if you provide the interview seat or the questionnaire in the midst of the discussion that will appear to be very cumbersome. So, while deciding which matter should go to the back matter because there are certain a pieces of information which are of course, important.

But not as important that they should be put in the discussion they actually can be put because they are the supporting materials. So, these supporting materials you can put

towards the back and for that if you feel that there are lots of pieces of information which actually a reader would like to know and understand; how they support and how they justify; you can put them in a several sections and every section has to be named for that you need some sort of appendices.

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If pieces of such information are longer and their numbers are so many; you can divide them into appendices A, appendices B and appendices C.

It is only the a very sincere and say a very interested readers; who would like to know; how the report writer has come to such a solution and later on, they will consult or they will consult the back matter where all these pieces interview seats then these graphs the charts this questionnaire all these things can be put in this back matter.
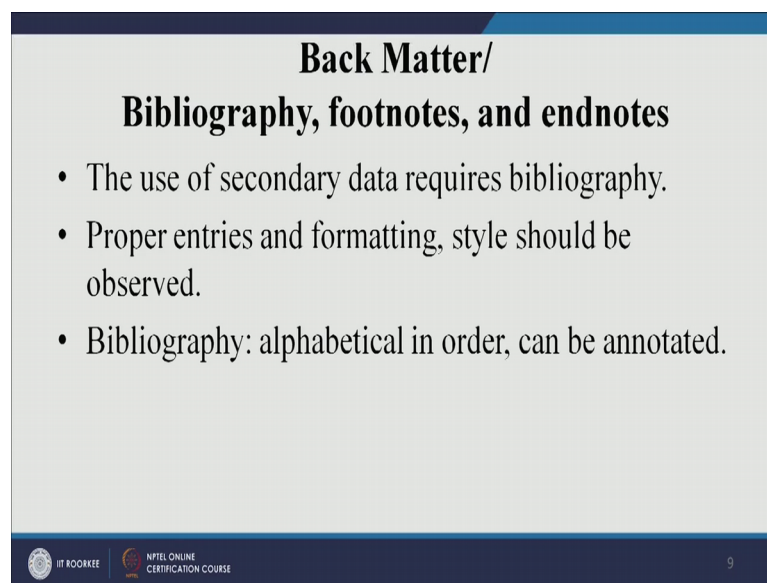
Next comes the list of references; now whenever you write a report; your report is based on the data, but then in order to prove your point, you also take the help of a some other observations by some other experts in that area and as I have said earlier, while you are culling out the information and while you are making notes, if you are going to quote from somebody else you had to put that into quotes.

But now here is a one place in the list of references; if you feel that your references or your supporting materials justify; what you are saying you can actually put that either in the bibliography or in the list of references; we also have to understand the difference

between the 2 and then we have a glossary and then index also. Now the first thing that is of utmost importance is to understand; how to document your report. Now when you document your report; what do you do is you actually provide the list of books list of say papers a list of journals from which you gathered information pieces of information for that you document your report.

Your report or your conclusions and recommendations may not be understood true unless and until they have some justification and for that you should mention.

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You should provide a bibliography as well as a list of references; you need to understand the difference between the 2 what actually is a bibliography; bibliography is actually the list of books that you have consulted, they are not data as such, but then they are secondary data and these secondary data requires to be put in the bibliography section when you are in the bibliography section the books that you have listed; there maybe you have not quoted from all the books.

But as a reader even if it is I or even if it is you would like to know because if your interest is sustained throughout you would like to have some further information also. So, when you are going to mention the names of the books in the bibliography section; it will actually help other researchers other readers other people interested in that sphere. So, there has to be a proper entry and that has to be followed by a proper formatting and style bibliography is provided in the alphabetical manner, whereas, you know if you find

that the a codes or the references are very less, then the references can be used as footnotes I mean if you are putting something on one page and if you; if the number is less you can put that in the footnote on the same page.

But if you feel that there are so many then you can number it towards the end of the report; either in the works cited or in the bibliography or list of references the basic difference between list of references and bibliography is that while the list of references are very particular. I mean if you have quoted something; it is mandatory that you make a mention of that whereas, in bibliography it is the complete list.

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Where you feel that this can be used for further reading a bibliography lists; both textual references and other works which you might have come across and which you feel that as a reader other people also would like to be interested.

Though the list is comprehensive maybe that you have not mentioned all of them or quoted from all of them, but as readers; they would of course, be interested in going through that a list of references as I said earlier are only those which you have cited in the text of your study or in the text of your report, but then while doing. So, there are several ways a much depends upon which style you are going to follow; there are several a citation styles especially in science people follow the APA style whereas, in a social sciences they follow the MLA documentation style.
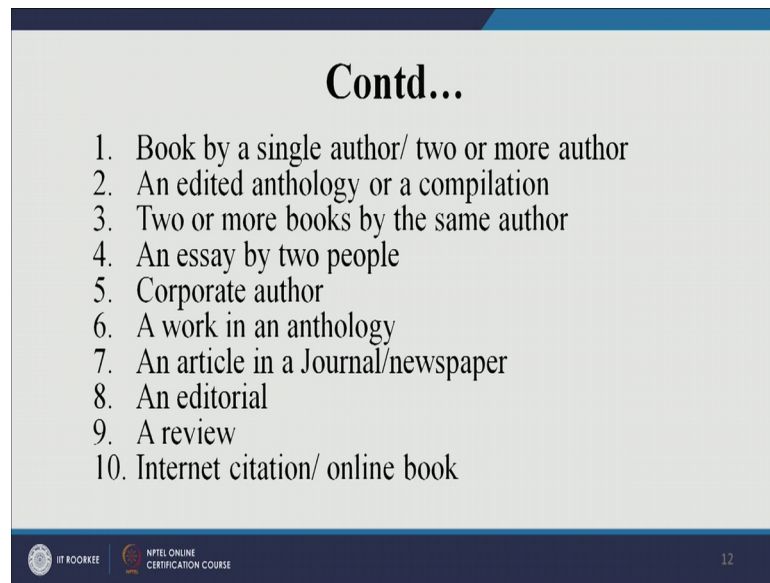
But, then you ought to understand the order of making the entries in the bibliography as well as in the list of references. So, the first is the author's name, but when you provide the authors name, if you write it in the footnotes; it is the complete one; whereas, if you write it in the bibliography, it starts with the surname you know; if the name of the author is Henry Williams. So, the William will come first comma and then come will come Henry, moreover if you are following it in the APA style; the year comes just after the name of the author whereas, in MLA the year is mentioned towards the end.

And then the name of the editor or name of the book and then the name of the series name of the place of publication, then year of publication and then the page numbers and then there can be several types.

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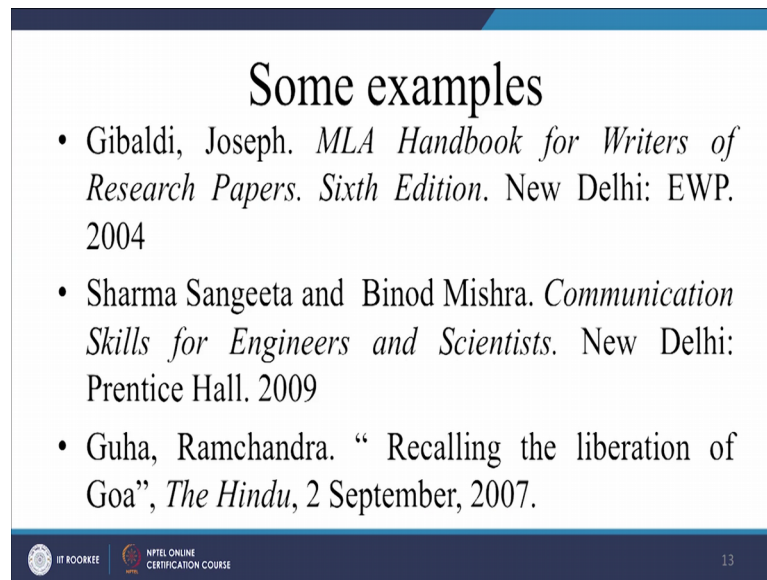
Suppose; sometimes you quote from one book which is by one author; whereas, on another occasion you quote from a book which is by 2 authors sometimes from a book which is by 3 authors. Sometimes, it is by a corporate author, sometimes, it is through an email entry; sometimes, it is the newspaper article; sometimes, it is say an essay in a book; sometimes, it is from an edited book; sometimes, it is from some a research from; sometimes, it is from an abstract.

So, the there are different sorts of a information that you call from and that you are going to cite it from. Let us see an example of how we can write a bibliography depending upon as I said depending upon the style that you are following suppose you are following the MLA style seat, then you have to follow like this; for example, if we are talking about a something.

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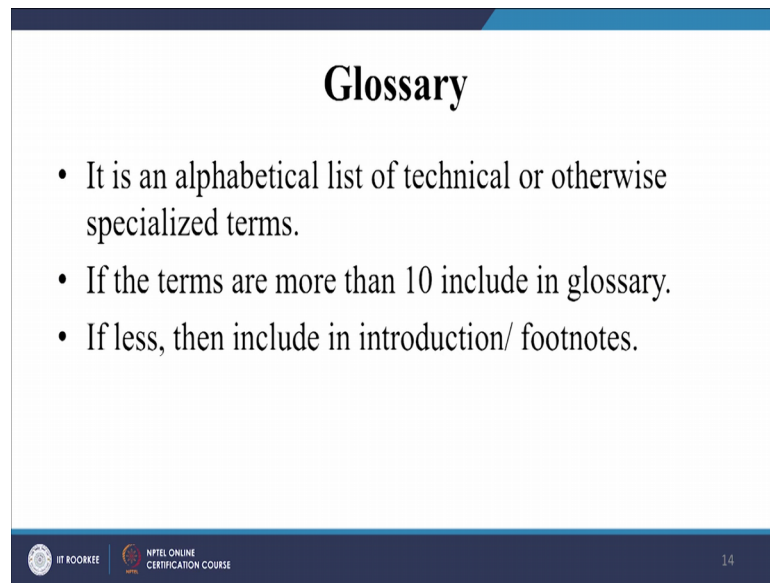
That you have a cited from MLA handbook for writers of research papers see that the name of the author is Joseph Gibaldi. So, the first name is Joseph, but it will begin with the surname and then will come the Joseph and then the name of the book will be in italics then the addition and then the place.

Suppose it is from the New York, we will write New York and then the name of the press; if it is prentice hall; prentice hall or OUP and then the year. But in terms of APA; this 2004 will come just after Gibaldi Joseph like that if it is an article from the newspaper; naturally; we will write the name of the contributor or the author and then we will write the title of the article and then we will also write the name of the a journal or the name of the newspaper sometimes people like that as italics. Sometimes, they underline it depending upon the practice whatever is feasible and whatever is a practicable in your organization you are to follow that.
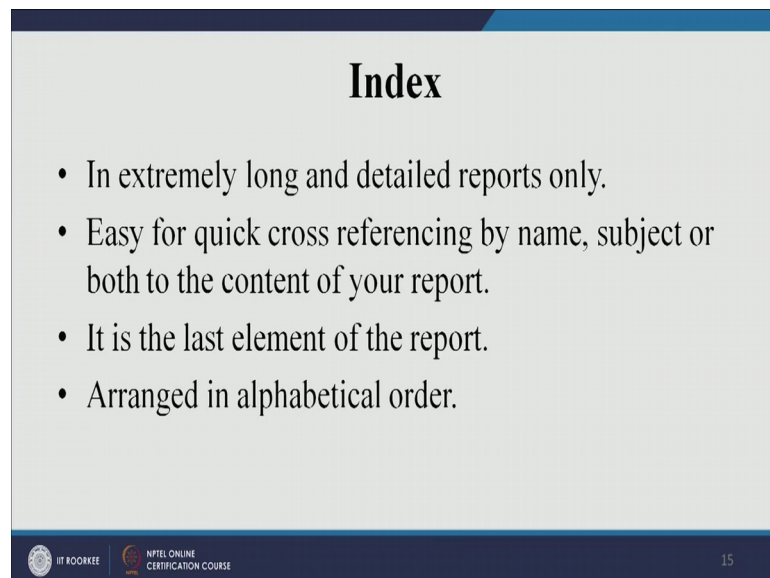
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Next is glossary, it is actually a glossary provides you a list of all the technical terms, but then this also is provided in an alphabetical manner. Say if I am interested in one particular word, naturally, I will go to the glossary and if there are, but see if the number is less; it is not feasible to provide a glossary if the number is more than 10-20 or say 100s; it is actually mandatory to provide a glossary; in case of glossary; there is another thing that also can be added to a report.

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This is index; in index extremely long reports only can have index suppose you want to go to a particular part particular part.

So, in index, you will find; it is index is also arranged in a alphabetical manner, but it is given as a main topic and then a subtopic now once you come to know all these structural elements of the report you are in a proper frame of mind to get ready to write the report. But remember having a lot of information and also knowing about the structural part of report; what is of utmost importance also to know about the sort of language you will apply or you will use while you are going to draft a report. Dear Friends- as writers of report; you need to be extra careful and vigilant because your report is the representation not only of you as an individual, but also as a member of your organization because the entire reputation of your organization also depends on the sort of reports that are being drafted or written by the professionals of that organization.

So, care has to be taken while drafting the report, but it is not only the information alone, rather how this information is going to be supplied or going to be provided in by making subtle use of language so that everyone can understand what the report is about and everyone can be helped in knowing the solution to a problem. I am quite hopeful that by understanding both these strategies and the structure of the report you are now in a proper frame of mind to start thinking of a report. But before thinking of writing the report let us also try to understand what sort of language can we use. We shall be talking about the report language in the next lecture.

Till then thank you very much; have a nice day.