

Communication Skills

Professional Writing

1. The Art of Writing Report and Memo

1.1 Report

A report is a structured, formal document prepared to present factual information, findings, analysis, or recommendations on a specific subject, to a defined audience, for a specific purpose, such as informing a decision, documenting an investigation, or recording the outcome of a project or activity.

A well-written report generally follows a clear, logical structure, typically including the following sections:

1. Title: A clear, concise title indicating the subject of the report.
2. Introduction: A brief statement of the purpose, scope, and background of the report.
3. Body (Findings / Discussion): The main content of the report, presenting facts, data, analysis, and discussion in a logically organised manner, often using headings, sub-headings, and supporting tables or figures where appropriate.
4. Conclusion: A summary of the key findings or outcomes discussed in the report.
5. Recommendations (where applicable): Specific, actionable suggestions arising from the findings of the report.

1.2 Memo (Memorandum)

A memo (short for memorandum) is a brief, relatively informal written document used for internal communication within an organisation, typically to convey routine information, instructions, reminders, or brief updates to colleagues or team members.

The key differences between a report and a memo are summarised below:

Aspect	Report	Memo (Memorandum)
Purpose	A detailed, structured document presenting information, findings, or analysis on a specific subject, often supporting a decision or recommendation	A brief, informal internal document used to communicate short, routine information, instructions, or reminders within an organisation
Length	Generally longer, and may include multiple sections, headings, and supporting data	Generally short, usually limited to one page, focused on a single topic

Structure	Formal structure, typically including a title, introduction, body (findings/discussion), conclusion, and recommendations	Simple structure, typically including headings for To, From, Date, Subject, and a brief message body
Audience	May be intended for readers both inside and outside the organisation, such as clients, management, or regulatory bodies	Almost always intended for internal circulation within the same organisation

Sample Memo Format:

MEMORANDUM

To: All Section Engineers

From: Maintenance Manager

Date: [Date]

Subject: Scheduled Shutdown of Machine Shop for Maintenance

This is to inform all concerned that the machine shop will remain closed for scheduled maintenance from [date] to [date]. All section engineers are requested to complete pending work orders before the shutdown period and to plan alternate arrangements accordingly.

For any queries, please contact the maintenance office.

2. CVs (Curriculum Vitae)

A CV (Curriculum Vitae), sometimes also referred to as a resume, is a structured written document summarising an individual's educational background, skills, work experience, and achievements, prepared for the purpose of applying for employment, further study, or other professional opportunities.

A well-prepared CV should be clear, well-organised, accurate, and tailored to highlight the qualifications most relevant to the position being applied for. A typical CV includes the following sections:

Section	Content
Personal / Contact Information	Full name, contact address, phone number, and email address, placed clearly at the top of the CV.
Career Objective / Summary	A brief statement (two to three lines) summarising the applicant's career goals and the value they aim to bring to a prospective employer.

Educational Qualifications	A list of academic qualifications, generally in reverse chronological order (most recent first), including institution names, years of completion, and grades/percentages.
Technical Skills / Key Skills	A list of relevant technical and professional skills, such as software proficiency, tools, or specific competencies relevant to the desired role.
Work Experience / Internships	Details of any previous employment, internships, or practical training, including organisation name, duration, role, and key responsibilities or achievements.
Projects	A brief description of significant academic or personal projects undertaken, particularly relevant for students and recent graduates with limited work experience.
Extracurricular Activities / Achievements	Notable achievements, awards, certifications, or extracurricular involvement that reflect positively on the applicant's abilities and character.
References (Optional)	Contact details of one or two individuals (such as a teacher or previous employer) who can vouch for the applicant's abilities, if requested by the employer.

A good CV should be concise (typically one to two pages for early-career applicants), free from spelling and grammatical errors, formatted consistently, and focused on presenting the applicant's genuine strengths and relevant qualifications clearly and honestly.

3. Letters: Job Application and Business

Formal letters remain an important form of professional written communication, even in an age dominated by email, particularly for certain official, legal, or ceremonial purposes. Two important types of formal letters are described below:

Type of Letter	Purpose	Key Elements
Job Application Letter (Cover Letter)	Written to formally apply for a specific job vacancy, introducing the applicant and highlighting their suitability for the role, usually accompanying a CV	Sender's address, date, receiver's address, subject line, salutation, introduction (position applied for), body (qualifications and suitability), closing (call to action), complimentary close, and signature
Business Letter	Written for formal, professional correspondence between organisations or individuals, such as placing an order, making an enquiry, or lodging a complaint	Sender's address, date, receiver's address, subject line, salutation, body (clearly structured message), complimentary close, and signature

Sample Job Application Letter Format:

[Applicant's Address]

[Date]

The Human Resources Manager

[Company Name]

[Company Address]

Subject: Application for the Post of Junior Engineer

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to apply for the position of Junior Engineer, as advertised on [source/date]. I have recently completed my Diploma in [Branch] from [Institution Name], and I believe my technical training and practical project experience make me a strong candidate for this role.

During my studies, I completed a project on [brief project topic], which strengthened my skills in [relevant skills]. I am confident that these skills, along with my willingness to learn, would allow me to contribute effectively to your organisation.

I have enclosed my CV for your reference and would welcome the opportunity to discuss my application further at your convenience.

Yours faithfully,

[Applicant's Name]

4. Drafting E-mail and Minutes of a Meeting

4.1 Drafting a Professional E-mail

Email remains one of the most common and important forms of professional written communication in the modern workplace. A well-drafted professional email should be clear, concise, polite, and appropriately structured, as outlined below:

Part of Email	Guidance
Subject Line	Should be short, specific, and clearly indicate the purpose of the email, allowing the recipient to understand its content at a glance.
Salutation	Should be appropriately formal or informal depending on the relationship with the recipient, such as "Dear Mr Sharma," or "Hi Priya," depending on context.

Opening Line	Should briefly state the purpose of the email clearly and directly, without unnecessary preamble.
Body	Should be organised into short, clear paragraphs, with the most important information presented first, avoiding unnecessary length or repetition.
Closing	Should include a clear call to action or next step, if relevant, followed by an appropriate closing phrase, such as “Regards,” or “Best regards,” and the sender's name and designation.

Sample Professional Email:

Subject: Request for Extension of Project Submission Deadline

Dear Mr Bose,

I am writing to request a short extension for the submission of the project report originally due on [date]. Due to an unexpected delay in receiving test data from the laboratory, I anticipate needing two additional working days to complete the report to a satisfactory standard.

I apologise for any inconvenience this may cause and assure you that the final report will meet the required quality standards. Please let me know if this extension is acceptable.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

[Sender's Name]

4.2 Minutes of a Meeting

Minutes of a meeting refer to the official, written record of the proceedings of a meeting, documenting the topics discussed, decisions taken, and action points assigned, for future reference and accountability. Well-prepared minutes typically include:

- The date, time, and venue of the meeting.
- The names of members present, and those who sent apologies for absence.
- The agenda items discussed, in the order they were addressed.
- A brief but clear summary of the discussion and any decisions reached on each agenda item.
- Action items, clearly stating the specific task, the person responsible for it, and the expected completion date.
- The date, time, and (where applicable) venue of the next meeting.

Sample Minutes of Meeting Format:

MINUTES OF MEETING

Date: [Date] Time: [Time] Venue: [Venue]

Present: [List of attendees]

Apologies: [Names of absentees, if any]

Agenda Item 1: Review of Project Timeline

Discussion: The team reviewed the current progress against the planned schedule and noted a minor delay in the testing phase.

Decision: The testing phase deadline will be extended by three working days.

Action: [Name] to revise and circulate the updated project timeline by [date].

Agenda Item 2: Budget Review

Discussion: [Brief summary of discussion.]

Decision: [Decision reached.]

Action: [Name] to [task] by [date].

Next Meeting: [Date, time, and venue of the next meeting]

5. Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

Answer the following questions by selecting the most appropriate option.

1. A report is best described as:

- A) A brief, informal internal note
- B) A structured document presenting information, findings, or analysis on a specific subject
- C) A personal diary entry
- D) A type of advertisement

2. A memo (memorandum) is typically used for:

- A) Detailed external client reports
- B) Brief, informal internal communication within an organisation
- C) Formal legal contracts
- D) Personal correspondence only

3. A CV (Curriculum Vitae) is primarily used to:

- A) Record daily attendance
- B) Summarise an individual's education, skills, and experience for a prospective employer
- C) Replace the need for a job interview entirely

D) Serve as a legal contract

4. In a CV, the 'career objective' section is meant to:

- A) List personal hobbies only
- B) Briefly summarise the applicant's career goals and value to a prospective employer
- C) List every subject studied in school
- D) Provide the applicant's home address only

5. A job application letter (cover letter) is generally written to:

- A) Replace the CV entirely
- B) Formally apply for a specific job vacancy and highlight suitability for the role
- C) Complain about a product
- D) Record minutes of a meeting

6. A business letter is typically used for:

- A) Casual conversation between friends
- B) Formal, professional correspondence between organisations or individuals
- C) Personal social media posts
- D) Internal-only communication

7. The subject line of a professional email should be:

- A) Left blank
- B) Short, specific, and clearly indicate the purpose of the email
- C) As long and detailed as possible
- D) Written only in capital letters

8. Minutes of a meeting refer to:

- A) The exact duration of the meeting only
- B) A written record of the discussions, decisions, and action points of a meeting
- C) A personal opinion piece about the meeting
- D) An informal chat log unrelated to the meeting

9. Minutes of a meeting typically include:

- A) Only the names of absent members
- B) Date, time, attendees, agenda points discussed, decisions taken, and action items with responsible persons
- C) Only a summary of the weather that day
- D) No reference to decisions taken

10. Which of the following is generally NOT a standard section of a formal report?

- A) Introduction
- B) Findings/Discussion
- C) Conclusion and recommendations
- D) A collection of unrelated personal anecdotes

11. A well-drafted professional email should generally:

- A) Present the most important information last, after lengthy background
- B) Be organised into short, clear paragraphs, with important information presented early
- C) Avoid any closing or sign-off
- D) Use overly casual language regardless of the recipient

12. In professional writing, the 'complimentary close' of a letter refers to:

- A) The subject line
- B) The polite closing phrase before the signature, such as 'Yours sincerely'
- C) The sender's address only
- D) The date of writing

13. A CV should generally list educational qualifications:

- A) In no particular order
- B) In reverse chronological order (most recent first)
- C) Only in alphabetical order by subject name
- D) Excluding the institution name

14. Action items recorded in the minutes of a meeting typically specify:

- A) Only the meeting's start time
- B) The task to be done and the person responsible for completing it
- C) Only the meeting venue
- D) The lunch menu for the next meeting

15. Compared to a report, a memo is generally:

- A) Longer and more formally structured
- B) Shorter, more informal, and focused on a single routine topic
- C) Never used within an organisation
- D) Identical in structure to a CV

Answer Key

1. B) A structured document presenting information, findings, or analysis on a specific subject | 2. B) Brief, informal internal communication within an organisation | 3. B) Summarise an individual's education, skills, and experience for a prospective employer | 4. B) Briefly summarise the applicant's career goals and value to a prospective employer | 5. B) Formally apply for a specific job vacancy and highlight suitability for the role | 6. B) Formal, professional correspondence between organisations or individuals | 7. B) Short, specific, and clearly indicate the purpose of the email | 8. B) A written record of the discussions, decisions, and action points of a meeting | 9. B) Date, time, attendees, agenda points discussed, decisions taken, and action items with responsible persons | 10. D) A collection of unrelated personal anecdotes | 11. B) Be organised into short, clear paragraphs, with important information presented early | 12. B) The polite closing phrase

before the signature, such as 'Yours sincerely' | 13. B) In reverse chronological order (most recent first) | 14. B) The task to be done and the person responsible for completing it | 15. B) Shorter, more informal, and focused on a single routine topic

6. Broad / Long Answer and Practice Questions

1. Explain the structure of a formal report, describing the purpose of each section.
2. Distinguish between a report and a memo, giving examples of situations where each would be appropriately used.
3. Draft a memo, in proper format, informing all staff of a change in office working hours starting from a specified date.
4. Explain the key sections that should be included in a well-prepared CV, and describe what makes a CV effective.
5. Draft a job application letter, in proper format, applying for the post of a trainee engineer in a manufacturing company of your choice.
6. Explain the key differences between a job application letter and a general business letter, giving an example of each.
7. Draft a formal business letter placing an order for office equipment from a supplier, including all necessary details.
8. Explain the key elements of a well-drafted professional email, and draft an email requesting leave of absence from your supervisor for personal reasons.
9. Explain the purpose and importance of recording minutes of a meeting, and describe the key elements that should be included.
10. Draft the minutes of a hypothetical departmental meeting discussing the planning of an upcoming technical seminar, including at least two agenda items, decisions, and action points.