BUREAU OF
SUGAR EXPERIMENT
STATIONS

WRITING FOR RESULTS

A Practical Workshop

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

Our **Writing for Results** Writers' Workshop is designed as a follow-up to the workshop held in Mackay last September. In it we look at the writing of project proposals in more detail and we will sharpen our skills in preparing informative, useful articles and news releases.

The workshop will include a review of the Sugar Research Council's *Five-Year Research and Development Plan* and the *Explanatory Notes Relating to Applications for Grants* from the Sugar Research and Development Corporation for 1991-1992.

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SRDC INSTRUCTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

We propose to hold a mini-seminar on the SRDC'S instructions. Keep this page for your notes.

PROPOSAL TECHNIQUE

For a short, preliminary proposal, try to get the following points on one or two sheets of paper:

1   **What is in it for me?**

Why would a reader be tempted to approve your proposal? How does it contribute to the aims of the organization and to its developmental strategy? For example, how will your project eliminate problems, reduce costs, improve results, remove uncertainties, increase profits, or whatever?

2   **How will you deliver what you have promised?**

What do you plan to do? Explain as simply as possible the project's methods and materials. Prove that what you propose will achieve the objectives set in the previous step.

3   **Are there any additional benefits?**

Mention it if there are likely to be spin-offs or additional benefits of any kind. Mention relationships with related research which might make your proposal more attractive to some readers.

4   **Is it worth it?**

Explain all costs and their part in the total cost of the project. Point out where techniques used in a project will create savings in overall costs.

5   **Are results assured?**

Protect the reader from risk. Explain how the project's results will be communicated and what use can be made of them.

Consider how you will expand and present these points in a final project proposal. Could you use graphics and tables to compress details?

Sample Chart
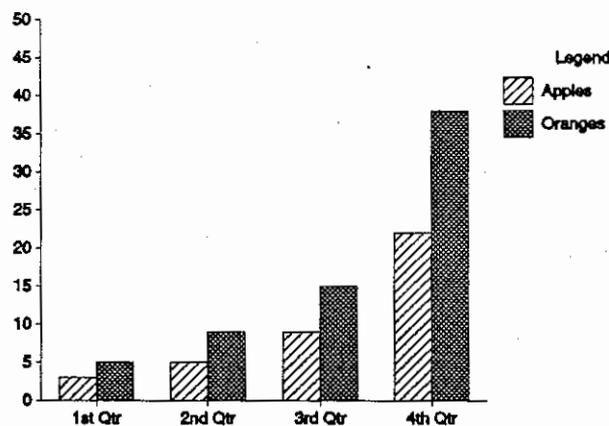
INTERVIEWING

Skilled interviewing is not just for journalists. It is one of your most important methods of gathering information. Adapt the following techniques to suit your style of preparing a story:

1   Prepare

Set a definite and achievable objective and do your homework. Find out what it is you want to know from your intended subject and get as much background information as you need to ask useful questions.

2   Plan how you will ask for someone's time

If you do not know a person well, you have to persuade them that your need to know is legitimate and that you are not wasting their time. Use your background reading to frame your request so that it is specific instead of vague and focused instead of diffuse. Be ready to summarize your reasons for the interview with the emphasis on the eventual benefits to the interviewee.

3   Prepare a list of questions

This list is only going to be tentative and you must be ready to abandon it if necessary. The main use of the list is to get the interview off to a good start and proceeding towards your objectives. If the drift of the conversation takes you off your expected path, so be it; let the interviewee talk.

4   Prepare your equipment

If you are going to tape an interview, check first that this is acceptable to the interviewee. Do not rely only on the tape. Have your notebook handy and use it. Keep your taperecorder to one side; some people will "clam-up" at the sight of one. Take an extension cord, spare batteries, and a notebook.

5   Observe the usual courtesies

A professional approach includes quickly getting down to business but not until you have relaxed your subject with the normal civilities and made sure that he or she knows your objectives. Take care that your dress and general appearance convey the correct messages about your professionalism.

6   Pursue specific information, but...

Highly specific questions can often be answered in a word. Vary your questions so that there is a mix of closed-ended questions and open-ended questions:

Have you every had a problem with rodents? is a closed-ended question.

Tell me about your worst experience with rodents is open-ended.

7   End with *Is there anything else you would like to add?*

Get an interviewee to help you to check the work.

MAKING SENTENCES MAKE SENSE

With each of the following sentences, decide what the problem is, then rewrite the sentence so that it makes sense.

Compose more than one sentence, if you think another sentence will help your reader to understand at first reading.

1   He worked for a chemical firm for over a year and he wants to go into that work again.

2   Headline: ELECTRIC FENCE FOR CANEGROWERS!!

3   Nitric acid is a liquid, volatile, highly corrosive, and cannot be kept in plastic containers.

4   This week we shall take our staff from the premises and have them fumigated.

5   The witness identified the accused as the man who had fired the shots from his protruding front teeth.

6   Furrow irrigation systems rarely use slopes above three per cent.

7   The secretary presented a cheque for $200 to the wife of the employee who was drowned on the instructions of the directors.

8   The first computer to be operated by an Australian canegrower was in 1953.

9   More information is needed on the weed problem. This will require a survey of users to be taken next week.

10   One BSES study found stalk growth rates of 24.7 mm per day immediately after irrigation.

11   As soon as they are corrected, these disadvantages will improve the procedure a great deal.

12   In two years in the Section, she managed to break every situation required by the rules.

13   This chapter describes three different irrigation systems and discusses their advantages and disadvantages.

14   The source of this evidence is from two interviews.

15   Waste water is collected by tail drains.

16   Founded on supplying the domestic market with the protection of an import embargo at a regulated price, not surprisingly Australian producers have been particularly attracted to those exports which could further afford some price protection.

DESCRIBING THINGS

Scientific and technical writers frequently have to describe things. Here are some simple techniques to help you:

1　Object

To describe an object, follow these steps:

1	What is it?	Give a definition from a dictionary or professional encyclopedia, or make up your own.
2	What is it used for?	State why the object is useful or important.
3	What does it consist of?	Explain simply the basic principle of its operation or construction, and give a generalized view of the whole object.
4	How does it work?	Describe the main parts and split these into minor parts, if necessary.
5	How do you use it?	Summarize briefly the operation or function of the object.

For practice:

Describe something which you deal with in your work. For example:

- Electronic calculator
- Instant camera
- Neutron probe moisture meter

- Fountain pen
- A plant disease (Notice how you will have to adapt some of your questions)
- Computer hardware

Name your intended audience.

2   Process

To describe a process, follow these steps:

1	What is it?	Give a definition.
2	What does it achieve?	State the significance and purpose of the process.
3	What is the sequence of events?	Explain the basic principles of the process.
4	How does it work?	Describe the main steps in the process and split these into minor steps, if necessary.
5	Why should we use it?	Summarize the benefits which come from the proper use of the process.

For practice:

Describe a technical, administrative, or scientific process with which you are familiar. For example:

- Logging on at the computer
- Completing a project proposal
- Handling a dangerous chemical

- Stool tipping
- Investigating an infestation of a pest
- Controlling rodents

Name your intended audience

3   **Incident**

        To describe an incident, follow these steps:

1	Who did what, where, and when?	Introduce names, dates, and places.
2	Why did the incident happen?	Explain the general background prior to the incident.
3	What happened?	Give a chronological list of the events and statements made. Use reported speech technique: *Mr Jones said that he always used a truck.*
4	What does it all mean?	State your conclusions and recommendations.

For practice:

1   Report an incident in which some equipment or a product failed in service.

2   Report a meeting which was held in connection with the Bureau's activities.

3   Report an incident which happens sometimes in your area of work.
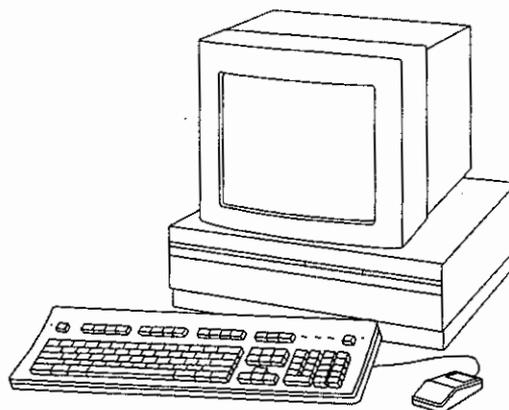
WRITING FOR SPECIAL AUDIENCES

Story patterns

1   Advance information story

Headline   to attract attention and mention the purpose
                                                    (WHY?) of the event.

Lead sentence   which contains all the needed information:
                                                    WHO is going to do WHAT, WHERE, AND
                                                    WHEN.

Story   which expands the headline's message and gives
                                                    readers an idea of what is going to happen
                                                    which will interest them.

2   Follow-up story or report

Headline   to attract attention and summarize the message.

Lead sentence   which tells WHO did WHAT, WHERE, and
                                                    WHEN.

Story   which contains all the details which the
                                                    organization wants to make known.

                                                    In "inverted pyramid" sequence.

                                                    It should summarize the "message" for those
                                                    who did not attend, reinforce the message for
                                                    those who did attend, and suggest that future
                                                    activities you organize will be worth attending.

3   Feature

Features are most useful when they answer a question which a reader might have about our organization. They should be built around a person or around people, if possible, to give them human interest.

Good features can be developed from "how-to-do-its", reports of research findings, explanations of technical matters and organizational activities, and plans for the future. Unusual or important people are good subjects for features, too.

Headline	to attract attention and suggest human interest.
Lead sentence	which answers the question.
Story	which "teaches" readers the answer to the "question". Typical questions which could be answered in a feature would be:

"Why has Brian Bloggs come to Australia?"

"Why are we building a new workshop at our Acacia Ridge Station?"

"How do you make a hilling-up board?"

For practice

1   Prepare an advance-information story.

2   Prepare a report, or follow-up story.

3   Prepare a feature.

4   Prepare a letter to the editor or a news release on a current topic.

Be ready to explain the sequence and style of your article or letter to a working group.

5   Edit a fellow writer's work. Be ready to explain the nature of your editorial amendments.

6   Prepare to explain to a group how you have used one of the following editing techniques:

    1   Eliminating errors of style (redundancy, surplus words, verbosity, jargon, shoptalk, indecisive words, and inaccurate words, for example).

    2   Remove 10% of total article length.

    3   Check the Fog Index of the work and adjust it to suit the audience.

    4   Edit line-by-line. Assume there is something wrong on every line and look at the line until you find it.

Very important documents require a professional editing technique. Look at a passage of text with the assumption that there is something wrong on every line. Try to ask an "editorial" question on every line. Perhaps there is nothing wrong on a particular line, but you assume that there is.

For example, look at this extract from a typical report. Read the editorial comments or questions about each line, then try to edit line-by-line the rest of the page yourself.

INSPECTION REPORT

Construction, Workmanship and Layout Evaluation

1   The unit was supplied in a dustproof steel case with all joints either welded or
2   gasket sealed. The case is hinged in the middle to allow access to the rear of
3   the rack mounted relay. A hinged cover with a perspex window is fitted to the
4   front. Cable entries are provided top and bottom and the terminal block was
5   fitted under the bottom cable entry.

6   The actual relay consists of three tiers of standard 19" rack mounting modules
7   with provision for optional modules to fit into prewired sockets. All wiring was
8   neatly performed on the plug sockets at the rear of the racks with fine green
9   insulted conductors. Automative type snap connectors are used for current
10 connections such as the IW91 module (current input). Stranded cables connect
11 from the racks to the external terminal block.

12 Each module is clearly marked for function and controls and its position in the
13 tier is clearly identified. The PCB tracks are very fine and the component
14 density is high which could cause repair problems. All PCB have been cleaned
15 of solder flux and protected by an insulated coating. The DC power supply is
16 protected by a series diode, 2A fuse and a parallel diode of which its function is
17 not known. During testing the parallel diode became a short circuit and
18 ruptured the fuse as shown in Figure 2. The fuse was concealed within the
19 module which had to be dismantled to be replaced with great difficulty as
20 shown in the photographs.

Comments

Line:

1   Are **all** and **either** needed?
2   Is a hyphen needed in **rack-mounted**?
3   To the front of what?
4   **Was** or **is**? (See is on line 3.)
6   **Actual** is superfluous. **Three** or **3**? Hyphen in **rack-mounting**?
7   "Provided with pre-wired sockets for optional modules"?
8   Do you **perform** wiring? **Fine** is ambiguous.
9   **Automotive** is misspelt.
10   Not clear: is "such as the IW91 module (current input)" superfluous? **From** is superfluous.

Now make a comment about every remaining line, if you can.

12 _____

13 _____

14 _____

15 _____

16 _____

17 _____

18 _____

19 _____