

Effective Writing
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Lecture - 17
Report Writing

Good morning friends. And, welcome back to NPTEL online lectures on Effective Writing. You are listening to online lectures on effective writing by Binod Mishra. And, today we are going to start Report Writing. Dear, friends in all the previous lectures you have been listening to the various nuances of writing. Today, we are going to talk about one very important and specific aspect of writing, which has become quite prominent in today's world. And, this is report writing.

Now, before we go on to talk about report writing. Let me ask you a simple question as to why are reports written? And, is it essential to write reports, also is it essential to learn, the art of report writing? Today's lecture, we will focus on these various aspects as to what report writing is, what are various processes involved in writing it why a report is written, what is the significance of a report and what can a report do?

Now, since all of you are techno savvy and information savvy as well, you might be reading newspapers and being tuned to TV channels every now and then. Recently you might have come across a very important piece of news, when the Government started a new Motor Vehicle Act, 2019. You might have seen, that with the enforcement of this act, there has been several sorts of news both good and bad.

The new motor vehicle act says that if you are driving a vehicle without a helmet. If, you do not have the proper papers, if you are violating the Motor Vehicle Act, you are bound to be fined; many people might not have liked this news. The reactions are varied and were varied rather, that had been adverse reactions also, but then there is a need to think and to think about why such a policy came into act.

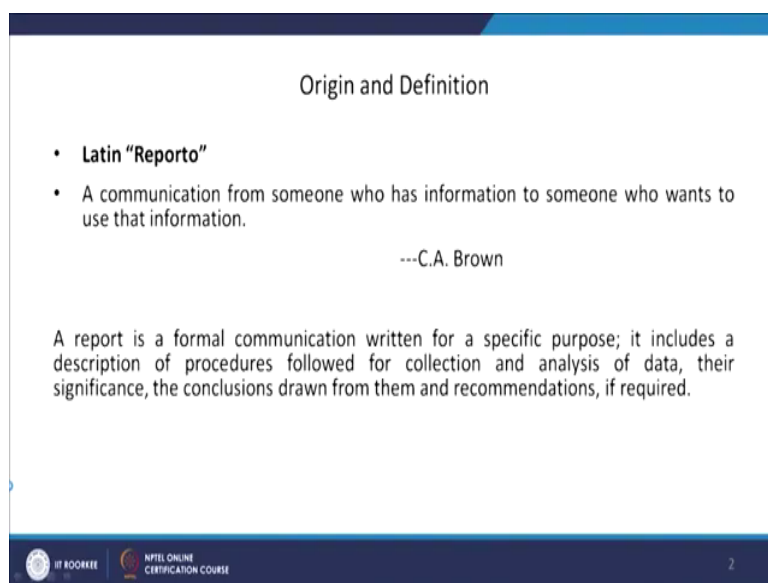
Why was the need to bring this act? How could it have been done? And, you know if you go into the depth of all these you will find, that based on a report it was found that every year around 5 lakh road accidents take place out of which 1.5 lakh people lose their lives, and the remaining 3.5 lakh people either they become crippled or they are having some problem or the other throughout.

Hence, the need to secure the lives of people such an act was brought into practice, how could it have happened? This also could have happened, because of a report, how could people know, how could the government know, that such and such was the problem? This came into light only when a proper reporting was done.

Hence, the importance of reports. So, now, it is time that we knew, what actually is report, what is the origin, how can a report be defined? Because when we talk about report suddenly, in your mind goes several sorts of reports, several sorts of reports, flashed into your mind. The examination report, the medical report, the investigation report, fine and then the lab reports, then stock verification report, I mean quality control report, several reports.

Now, how are these reports different and how can these reports be written? Because, a report to be written is based on the need and, hence we will talk about, what a report is. My dear friends the word report of today has its origin in the Latin word "Reporto or Reportier".

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The slide is titled "Origin and Definition" and contains the following text:

- **Latin "Reporto"**
- A communication from someone who has information to someone who wants to use that information.

---C.A. Brown

A report is a formal communication written for a specific purpose; it includes a description of procedures followed for collection and analysis of data, their significance, the conclusions drawn from them and recommendations, if required.

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It is actually a combination of two words Re and Portier. The meaning is all of you are acquainted with a porter. A porter is a person, who transfers our goods from one place to another, likewise when we talk about a report; the literal meaning is a piece of information from someone to be given to someone, who wants to use that information. Hence, the literal definition of report can be it is actually a piece of communication.

Now, what a piece of communication? If we say that anything that can be written, because when we say it is a written piece. Anything that can be written can we call all these reports, I mean if you write a poem that also can be a report, if somebody writes a story that also can be a report, a play for that matter can be report, a novel for that matter can be reports. Of course, they can be provided, they have actually some amount of facts involved into it that is why a book also is a report based on facts.

And, then we can define report as a formal communication, because a report is a factual piece of writing. And, hence it is a formal piece of communication written for a specific purpose. I mean all these reports that we have been talking about these reports vary, when we talk about an examination report naturally a student's come into question. When you talk about lab reports experiments come into question, when you talk about investigation report, naturally a police investigation another investigations come into force or practice.

So, a report is a formal communication written for a specific purpose. Meaning thereby the purpose of every report will be different. It includes a description of procedures. Now, how do you come to write a report? As it is a factual thing, naturally you have to do a lot of thing before you come to write the report writing the report is the last stage of report. A procedure followed for collection and analysis of data.

Since, it is factual and when we talk about facts data comes into question, their significance the conclusions drawn from them and recommendations if required. So, in a way a report is a factual formal piece of communication, written for a specific purpose, written for specific audience, it includes a description of procedures followed for collection and analysis of data, and out of these data, based on these data, the conclusions drawn from them and recommendations if required.

The question is recommendations if required, meaning thereby report writers are not supposed to recommend unless and until they have been asked to, that is why, when we talk about the nature of reports, reports vary, from one report to another they vary. Again, it is time we came to know the differences between all forms of writing. I mean reports as I said it is written specifically other forms of writing as we have been saying poems stories, plays, novels, other things as well, they are different how are they different reports are actually objective.

When you want to write a poem, when you, when somebody writes a story? It is very much subjective, emotion has got a place in it, but reports are objective because they are based on

facts. And for every report, because it will have a specific purpose naturally it should have a specific audience as well.

So, reports have got defined audience, other forms of writing will not have defined audience rather they will have varied audience. Reports are based on facts and investigation, other forms of writing are based on emotion imagination, expression, whatsoever, there is no autonomy in reports whereas, other forms of writing have got autonomy involved in it.

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The slide is titled "How are Reports different from other forms of Writing?". It is divided into two columns. The left column is headed "Reports" and lists seven characteristics: Objective, Well defined audience, Based on facts and investigation, Highly structured, Language to be concise and concrete, Can be presented orally, and Can be written on demand. The right column is headed "Other writings" and lists seven characteristics: Subjective, Varied audience, Self-expression, imagination, Scope for autonomy, Flexible language, Confined to writing, and Can be choice based. At the bottom left, there are logos for IIT ROORKEE and NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE. At the bottom right, the number 3 is displayed.

Reports	Other writings
✓ Objective	✓ Subjective
✓ Well defined audience	✓ Varied audience
✓ Based on facts and investigation	✓ Self-expression, imagination
✓ Highly structured	✓ Scope for autonomy
✓ Language to be concise and concrete	✓ Flexible language
✓ Can be presented orally	✓ Confined to writing
✓ Can be written on demand	✓ Can be choice based

I mean, if you have a look at this slide, you can find the basic differences between the reports. So, let us now proceed to the other aspects of report. Now, one question that might creep in your mind is can reports be presented orally also yes, reports can be presented orally, but then there are many other forms of writing, which are confined only to writing, they cannot be

presented orally. For example, if somebody writes a novel can the entire novel be presented orally not at all fine.

So, writing in terms of reports is based on a demand, that is why you find, when something goes wrong and the world that we live in my dear friends, everyday things go wrong and when things go wrong, they actually have to be investigated they have to be examined and then people will say reports have not come. You remember we are talking about thesis writing and you know when you submit a thesis, when you submit a thesis, these thesis they are sent to examiners and then we are waiting for the reports also. So, that is thesis report.

So, every report is actually based on demand and other forms of writing they are not demand based they are actually choice based. One question, that many of us may have is writing reports very essential and that actually puts us to discuss the importance of reports. Why are reports essential, life could have been beautiful even without writing reports no. Today life can be beautiful only when we have been in a position of writing reports. I mean people from time to time should evaluate themselves also to see where they stand and that is also possible.

Of course, people do not write reports for their own, they write reports for organizations, for companies, for institutions, fine for markets fine. Now, what do these reports do? Reports actually let us know the progress of a project the progress of an assignment. Hence, its importance lies and when you are working on a project from time to time, whether you have got a project, you have got to write a thesis, you have got to do some assignment from time to time you are asked about the progress. And, that is possible through reports.

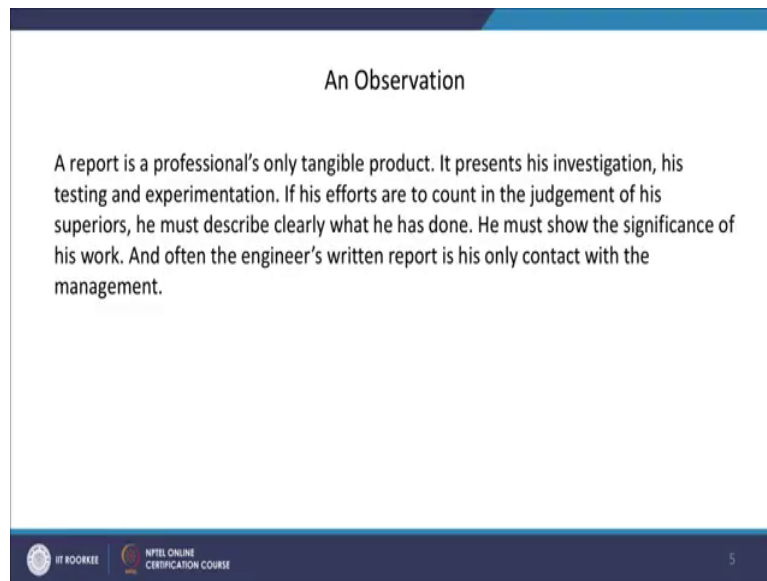
Then, do you not think that this course on NPTEL, I mean all the courses of NPTEL. They also might have been possible based on a report is not it. People might have been thinking, that all these online courses are not available to everyone. And, hence the need that they could be made available to everyone and this also might have been possible based on a report. And, today you see that the online courses have gained their importance and they have become very significant.

So, reports also and sometimes things go wrong, that also can be revealed through reports. Reports also reveal gaps in thinking and through reports people are made aware, that is why, when something new is to take place either before the launching of it, it is mandatory to tell people. And, how can people be told people can be told through reports awareness can be created. And, it is report that a spreads information, something new comes into practice and that is told by dint of report and people come to know. It is only on the basis of reports that this is not can be taken. So, reports help in decision making and it also establishes harmony.

Imagine, when a group of people they are not having proper communication and things go wrong. And, when something goes wrong and that is investigated or examined it comes to a conclusion or the report writer comes to a conclusion, because there was no proper communication among people among employees, among group members, hence this happened. So, with the help of a report people can be brought closer. I mean all sorts of communication bring people closer and reports actually help in establishing a sort of harmony.

Now, here is an observation that is a paramount importance it says all of you, who are working hard for getting a job or those who are fortunately in jobs, they might find it quite essential.

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An Observation

A report is a professional's only tangible product. It presents his investigation, his testing and experimentation. If his efforts are to count in the judgement of his superiors, he must describe clearly what he has done. He must show the significance of his work. And often the engineer's written report is his only contact with the management.

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That a report is a professional's only tangible product, there is one observation, which says that a report is a professional's only tangible product. Why tangible? Because, it tells us many qualities about the people. It presents his investigation, his testing and experimentation. If his efforts are to count in the judgment of his superiors, he must describe clearly, what he has done. When you are saying something to somebody that is also form of report?

But, what you are saying, that has to be based on facts and hence he must saw the significance of his work and often the engineer's written report, which is only contact with the management. And, not only engineer my dear friend, every professional whatever he or she fine, does that is possible to be shown to reports, hence a report is a professionals only tangible product. Do not you think, that when we have been talking a lot about these reports

we should also know, what are the typical business reports? I mean at a surface level we can because you know reports, can be of various natures of various types.

So, let us confine ourselves to discussing some of the reports only by knowing what they can do? I mean we have been talking about the update of progress with the help of a report and this progress is done from time to time, hence there can be periodic reports. These periodic reports help us to monitor operations. I mean what has been done, how much of work has been done, how much of work is left, how many men and materials are required, what amount of time is required? So, all these can be done through periodic reports, I mean based on periodic reports.

Then comes situational reports. Now, these situational reports higher of a very routine the nature, because it only describes non-recurring activities, non-recurring activities, maybe you go on a trip somebody goes on a conference somebody go to have some statistics analysis or whatsoever. Now, these things since they are not very frequent that is why we call it situational reports. And, in situational reports language plays a very important role my dear friend and then we come to investigative or informative reports.

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The slide is titled "Typical Business Reports" and lists three categories of reports:

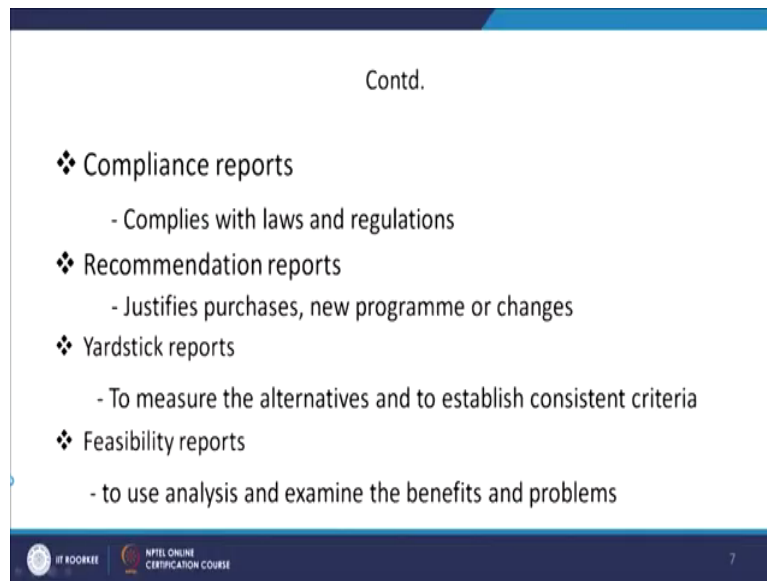
- ❖ Periodic reports
 - To monitor operations
- ❖ Situational reports
 - to describe non recurring activities, such as trips/conference reports.
- ❖ Investigative/informative reports
 - to examine situations or problems and supply facts.

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Though to tell you the truth most of the reports are informative reports by nature, but then some reports go one step ahead and they interpret things, we shall discuss that further when we come to that section. But, then an investigative report is simply based on the examination of a particular situation of problems and then you simply supply facts. You do not do anything I mean there is no rule of any conclusion, you cannot recommend anything, you are simply to find out what is what and then supply the facts.

Another category of reports my dear friends is compliance reports.

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- ❖ Compliance reports
 - Complies with laws and regulations
- ❖ Recommendation reports
 - Justifies purchases, new programme or changes
- ❖ Yardstick reports
 - To measure the alternatives and to establish consistent criteria
- ❖ Feasibility reports
 - to use analysis and examine the benefits and problems

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Now, this compliance reports actually comply with government norms with laws regulations. Suppose, you have been asked to or as a manager, you have been asked to ensure that things go on well in your organization and there are particular norms for that. So, from time to time the government or the organization also wants to see, whether these norms are being followed or not. If, some major amount has been granted, how that amount is being utilized are the norms being complied with or not. So, hence this is called compliance reports.

Then, we come to recommendation reports. Recommendation reports are those reports; suppose you are going to take a decision is not it. You cannot take a decision without the help of a report. So, based on that what you do is in a recommendation report, you are going to justify suppose you are going to purchase some new product, you are going to launch some new programs, you are also going to make certain changes and for all the changes to

effectuate or to take place, you actually provide a sort of recommendation report is not it. And, based on that report some decisions may be taken.

Then we come to yardstick reports. Now, what are yardstick reports, yardstick reports or reports, which actually help in measuring the alternatives? Suppose there are certain options alternatives available, what should we go with are we going to invite this contractor are we going to give this project to some other organization. Now, there are certain yardsticks now how can you take a decision you cannot take a decision unless and until you have alternatives, but these alternatives have to be measured and then have to be establish consistent criteria.

So, with the help of this yardstick report, you are actually going to formulate a criterion for allowing, for disapproving, for judging and then you that is why yardstick report becomes important. Then there is feasible reports. What are feasible reports? Feasible report as the term itself, say feasibility. So, by feasibility we mean actually is there any scope that if we go with this we will have certain benefits. So, a feasibility report actually analyses the benefits and the problems.

If, we go by this, if we launch this product, if we gave this project to this party, we have this much a benefit maybe we also can have certain problems. So, feasibility reports help us decide, whether there are benefits and problems and based on that we can take some action. So, these are actually typical business reports that we come across, when you are in organizations, but then if we keep on discussing all these reports my dear friend; it will actually become very exhaustive.

Hence, we are to divide our reports into two categories formal and informal in organizations also at times, there are informal reports, being written we have already talked about memo reports, letter reports, sort reports; all sort reports are actually informal. And, you know when some major decision is to be taken, because there are times when we want to understand and ensure that such a step either will be beneficial or will be disastrous. So, for that we go for interpretive or analytical report.

So, when we talk about the differences between the formal and the informal reports.

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The slide is titled "Formal and Informal Reports" and is divided into two columns. The left column is headed "Formal" and lists four characteristics: "Should have all parts of structure.", "Content depends both on primary and secondary sources", "Visual aids", and "May be long". The right column is headed "Informal" and lists four characteristics: "No graphics", "Depends on primary sources", "Written in first person", and "Usually short". At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for "IIT KOOBEE" and "NTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE", along with the number "8".

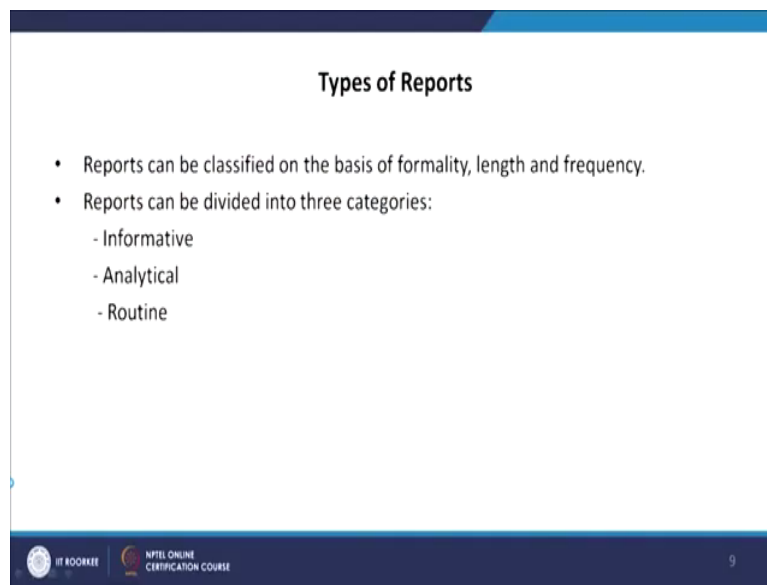
Formal	Informal
❖ Should have all parts of structure.	❖ No graphics
❖ Content depends both on primary and secondary sources	❖ Depends on primary sources
❖ Visual aids	❖ Written in first person
❖ May be long	❖ Usually short

One major difference is that in that an informal report is very short, it does not have any graphic any design, it simply depends upon the primary sources, it does not go for the secondary sources and formal reports are mostly, because they may be in the form of a letter, they may be in the form of a memo. So, they may be written in the first person narrative whereas, a formal report will be written in the third person narrative. Formal reports usually maybe longer will have it is go for visual aids and it will depend upon or it will take the information based on both primary as well as secondary resources.

Now, as I have been saying that reports are of different natures and there can be a long list of reports. So, it is better that we classify these reports and how can we classify these reports? We classify these reports so, that so, many reports will come in one category there are other

reports that will come into other categories my dear friend. Reports can be classified on the basis of formality. We have already talked about in the previous slide; we have already talked about the differences between formality and Informality.

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The slide is titled "Types of Reports" and contains the following text:

- Reports can be classified on the basis of formality, length and frequency.
- Reports can be divided into three categories:
 - Informative
 - Analytical
 - Routine

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When, you simply have to send some information that can be possible only by informal means, you simply go to write an informal report. But, when some major decisions are to be taken and you require a lot of analysis, a lot of interpretation, a lot of discussion you go for formal reports. So, based on formality, then length also as informal reports are shorter informal reports, they are usually shorter than formal reports and then frequency, frequency.

So, short reports will be more in frequency whereas, longer reports because they have to be written very discretely is not it that is why they will take a lot of time. So, reports we can divide into three categories. The first is informative, then analytical or interpretive and then

routine reports. I mean only during in these three categories most of the reports will come. Now, what are informative reports? Let us look at the word informative.

So, when we talk about the word informative it actually tells us that informative reports will be simply giving information, it is only confined to information is not it? And, then it is aims and objectives also are very much restricted fine. And, it is expected to give or provide information as it is I mean you are not going to do anything with an informative report, that is why informative reports will be very shorter fine, maybe at times 1 page, 2 page in many organizations, you will have simply a format of informative report, where you need to fill in certain pieces of information.

And, the report writer will simply put his signature, I mean the report writer is not supposed to provide any conclusion or any analysis or any recommendation. On the right hand side, you can find the examples of all these informative reports.

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Informative Reports	
Specification	Examples
➤ Confined to information.	Policy Statements
➤ Restricted to aims and objectives.	Readership Surveys
➤ Required to provide information as it is.	Sales Report
➤ No analysis and recommendation.	Credit Reports
	Employee booklets
	Committee Reports
	Production Reports

Such as policy statements, readership surveys, then sales report, then credit reports, I mean you will find that these reports only tell, what is the number? How much have we gained? It does not talk about, why we have failed? What can be the other ways to improve the sales? What can be other ways to retain the customers and all? So, they can be read when we talk about interpretive or analytical report.

Now, what are analytical reports? Analytical report, if we take the words of the report itself, we will find that there is a scope for analysis, there is a scope for interpretation, there is ample scope for analysis, investigation and hence this report will be longer, you also can make the use of illustrations. For example, suppose you are going to write a report for an organization, which actually wants to know about the trends of sales or the trends of satisfaction about a particular product, naturally you will take a time lag of say 5 years is not it.

So, naturally these 5 years how can you show you can show it with the help of certain illustrations certain graphs charts, pie charts, fine. They may be several tables also involved in it and then an analytical reports will have findings and recommendations, and based on an analytical report you can find a solution to a problem. Most of the reports are written only, because it is the need of the our.

As it is need based and when some problem arises we want to write a report and when you want to write a report, naturally you are actually to provide solution to the problem. That is why, you do not write a report yourself, there are people, there are organizations, which actually instruct you to write reports and when they do so, they actually give you some problem. And, then these analytical reports may lead to decision making.

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Analytical Reports	
Specification	Example
❖ Ample scope for analysis	➤ Advertising
❖ Interpretation of data chiefly of investigation	➤ Examination
❖ Use of illustrations	➤ Accounting
❖ Findings and recommendations	➤ Statistical analysis
❖ Solution to a problem.	➤ Market surveys
❖ Leads to decision making	

So, the examples of analytical reports are advertising reports, examination report, accounting, statistical analysis, market service. Now, it actually goes in depth and that is why the report goes longer, maybe at times the length of the report may go between 20 to 25 pages. Whereas, an informal report will confine itself to 1 to 2 or 3 pages depending upon the need fine; so, these are analytical reports.

And, then we come to the third category of reports, which are routine reports. Routine reports by its terminology itself it tells that they are of routine nature. Routine nature means, they keep on being written, but at routine intervals, at regular intervals. So, the specifications of these routine reports are that they are written regularly, but at fixed intervals.

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The slide is titled "Routine Reports" and is divided into two columns: "Specifications" and "Examples".

Specifications	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Written regularly but at fixed intervals▪ Reports regular matters such as production, sales performance, inventory etc.▪ Confined to fixed proforma▪ Language least important	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Progress Report➤ Inspection Report➤ Confidential Report➤ Laboratory Reports

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For example, in most of the organizations you will find annual reports are being written. And, there is a particular time for that towards the end of the year or towards the end of the

financial year, that may vary from one organization to another my dear friend, but then it is it actually is written at fixed intervals. And, these reports actually, they provide us information regarding production, sales performance, inventory and of some other nature also.

It is actually confined to a fixed pro forma pro forma is fixed for that every organization will have different pro forma, but that pro forma continues maybe, after certain amount of time there may be some changes in the pro forma, but that no changes also will be effectuated based on a report my dear friend.

Hence, the need and the importance of the report, and then language is not that important in a routine report you know, we have been talking about language, but in interpretive reports, because the report writer has come to a conclusion he has found that some major steps can be taken. So, naturally an interpretive reports will become persuasive in nature whereas, a routine report is not persuasive in nature, it is actually a very much sort of informative reports, where language does not play a vital role. Have a look at the examples of these reports progress reports, inspection reports, confidential reports and laboratory reports.

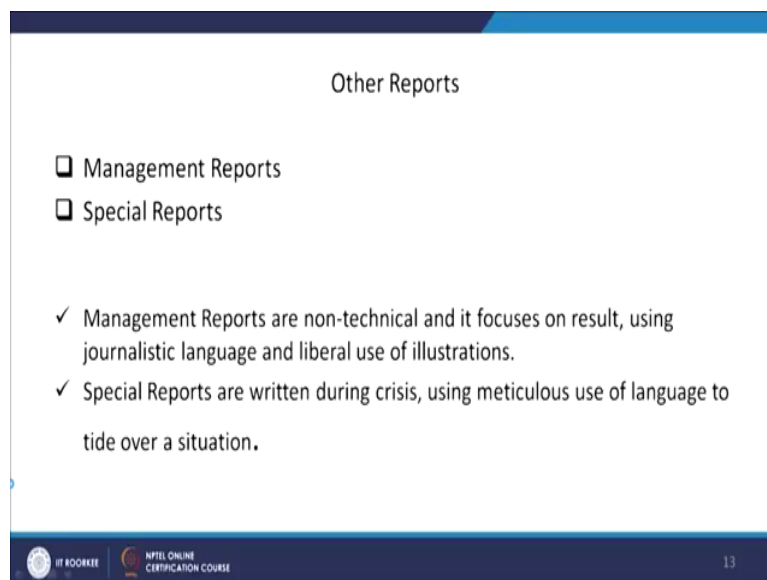
You will find that if you are working in an organization from time to time, your progress is also being evaluated and for that there is a fixed pro forma. And, that fixed pro forma has a several attributes, that actually are measured about an employee and the report writer whosoever may be writing it, what he or she does is actually takes or fills up some information, but then he does not provide any solid conclusion and nothing can be based on it. For this report if it goes to be interpreted. So, any decision that will be taken will be based on the interpretation of this report. Hence routine reports my dear friend.

So, these are actually the three classifications of reports first as we discussed, first was informative which was actually confined to information. The second was analytical where we talked about analysis and then the third is routine reports, where we talked about the inflammation of routine nature and which are written from time to time at regular intervals, but in a fixed pro forma. There can be other reports also, because you know in organizations, there are several activities taking place. And, based on that from time to time apart from all

these reports, there can be some other reports also being written what are they these reports either can be management report.

Now, what his management report and how are management reports different? In management report, it is not that much of interpretive, for a management report all you need to do is you actually the audience members or the leaders they are interested more only in the results. And, that is why management reports are non-technical.

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The slide is titled "Other Reports" and contains the following content:

- Management Reports
- Special Reports

- ✓ Management Reports are non-technical and it focuses on result, using journalistic language and liberal use of illustrations.
- ✓ Special Reports are written during crisis, using meticulous use of language to tide over a situation.

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And, written by non-technical people also and it simply focuses on result and it uses a language that is journalistic. A language is totally journalistic and of course, you have scope for the use of illustrations in a management report. So, management report does not interpret too much, but then it simply shows the results.

Then, there is another category of report which of course, becomes very important during times of crisis; we can label them as a special reports. Now, these special reports by the title itself they are special. And, these reports are not written every now and then the frequency of such reports is too less. So, these special reports are written only during crisis and here the report writer has got a freedom and the freedom why, because when you are writing something during critical hours or during crisis you actually want to get out of that crisis.

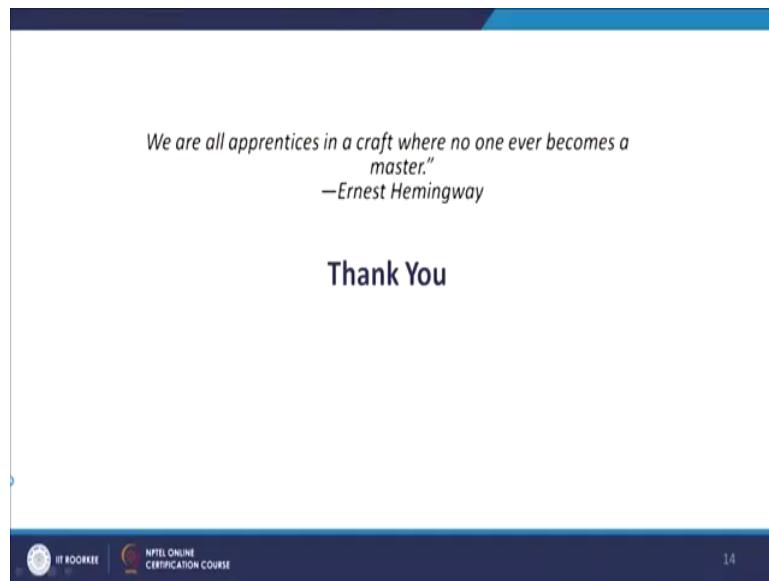
So, in order to get out of that crisis naturally you have to convince people. So, language as I have been telling that language has a very important role in convincing people in persuading people. So, a meticulous use of language is expected to be a part of a special report, because based on this report, you can because through this report, your persistent effort is to convince people are to come out of or to help, the organization come out of such a crisis.

Hence, such reports focus very much on the importance of language a language has to be used very meticulously by different.

So, these are the various types of reports and since right from the beginning we have been saying that reports are need base my dear friend and you cannot become a good report writer every now and then, but then you might be thinking do you really need to write reports yes. If, you are in organization sometimes or the other you may be given the responsibility of writing reports. And, this is not given to any fixed people, it may change also sometimes you may also feel the need and the necessity of writing reports.

Hence, report writing is a craft my dear friend and we cannot become a perfect report writer just in one day all we need to do is we actually need to practice my dear friend. And, hence before we come to the close of this lecture, let me provide a quote by Ernest Hemingway a very important novelist of his time, who says we are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.

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So, all of us are practicing my dear friend and when we are practicing we ought to understand that we ought to. So, not only our interest, but also see to whom we are writing because all writings. Finally, will persuade or convince people to take an action, an action can be taken only when action is pro people, pro organization, pro world, pro nation.

Thank you very much.