Effective Writing
Prof. Binod Mishra
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee

Lecture - 19
Style of Report Writing

Good morning friends and welcome back to NPTEL online lectures on Effective Writing. You are listening to these lectures by Binod Mishra and presently we are in the report writing section. If you remember well in the previous lectures we have talked about the report formats, report definitions, the differences between reports and other forms of writing. And then we have also talked about the report structure and the report strategies.

Now, is the time we talked about report style, you might be thinking that when you talk about report style will we be confined only to the style that is maintained while writing reports, no my dear friends. This can also apply to other scientific writings which is actually written for specific purposes in your organization, but the more focus will be on writing the reports because we are discussing reports presently.

When you talk about style what exactly we mean by style? When you talk about style we actually mean the elements to make your writing effective in a particular format, in a particular manner that actually helps readers to take some action. Because if you remember well we have already talked about in the previous lectures that report writing helps to take some decision, and report also provides a solution to a problem.

So, if the report is not written effectively then how can we provide a solution, that is why it comes to be discussed as to what report style is and in what way reports can be written. In a brief way we can say that the style of report is actually telling you the various nuances of writing the report.

Now, when we talk about writing the reports our concern is towards language, I mean the effective use of language in reports, we have already talked about the effective use of

language in letters, memos, then in academic writings, but then report writing is a bit different as you might have observed through previous lectures.

Now, there are certain things that we shall be discussing about the language part here in the section and that is the very first thing that comes to our mind is, as we said language and what language comprises language actually comprises off choice of words and phrases, redundancies, jargons, cliche use of foreign words fashionable words and metaphorical expressions.

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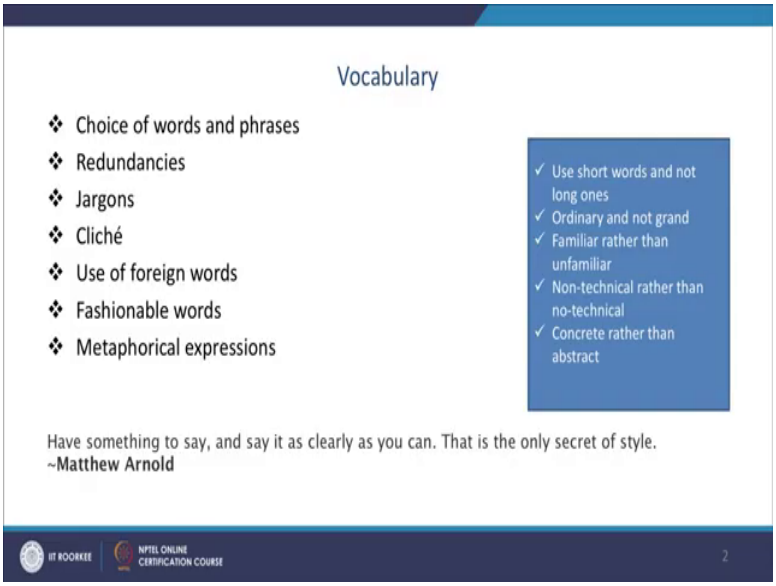

My dear friends since the aim of report writing is to persuade is to convince is actually to draw home our points, points of our observation points of our findings that is why we actually need to draft our report in a manner that the reader not only comes to understand it, but then the reader is prepared to take some action.

So, in that very first section, while discussing vocabulary we ought to understand what exactly we mean by vocabulary. My dear friends the entire report is actually woven by sentences and paragraphs, imagine if you are going to read a report which is very cumbersome because as you have already learnt in the previous lectures that an interpretive report will be longer than an informative reports.

So, when you are going to find some solution about a problem you are going to discuss and the way you discuss the way you convince will enable the readers to take some action that is why the use of language plays a very important role in report writing.

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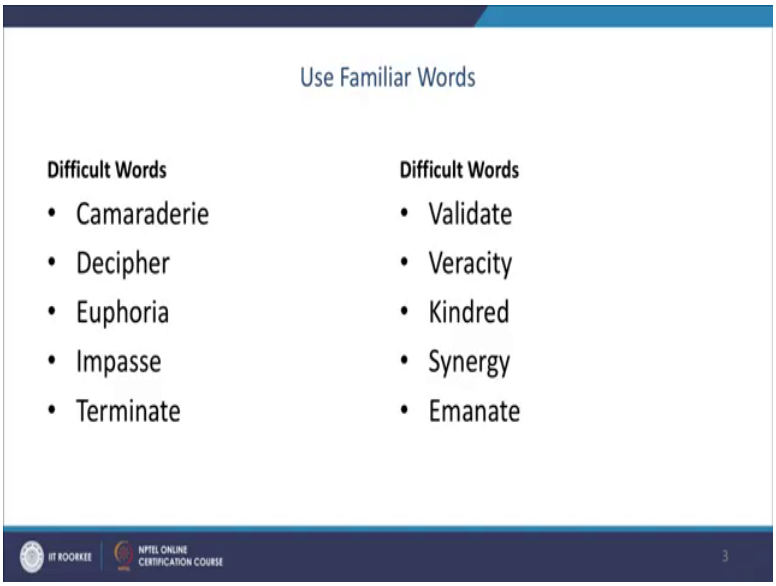

Now, when you talk about words, words can be both long, words can be short, words can be ordinary, words can be extraordinary words can be exceptional words can also be those that can be used just to familiarize. Now when we are using words we find most of the time that

many readers I mean many indiscreet readers while writing their reports what they do is they actually do not bother much about the use of words and they use longer words and they tire the readers.

So, there are certain precautions to be taken when you are going to use words, because all forms of writing including report writing actually aims at clarity and my dear friends clarity can be ensured only when you use words very discretely. One must almost try to use short words and long words also, but not only the long words, long words people often use when they do not find an exact word, when they are trying to convince something, but then there are words which even though they are short they can be understood.

So, please try to use short words try to use not grand words, but ordinary words by ordinary words we mean those words which our audience or our readers are familiar with, and then when you are writing a report naturally it becomes a sort of technical writing. And in technical writing there is a tendency among writers to use over technical words, because they are not exposed to other forms of writing. And suppose this technical writing or report writing when the report goes to a person who is not much exposed to technical words naturally he will not be in a position to take decisions.

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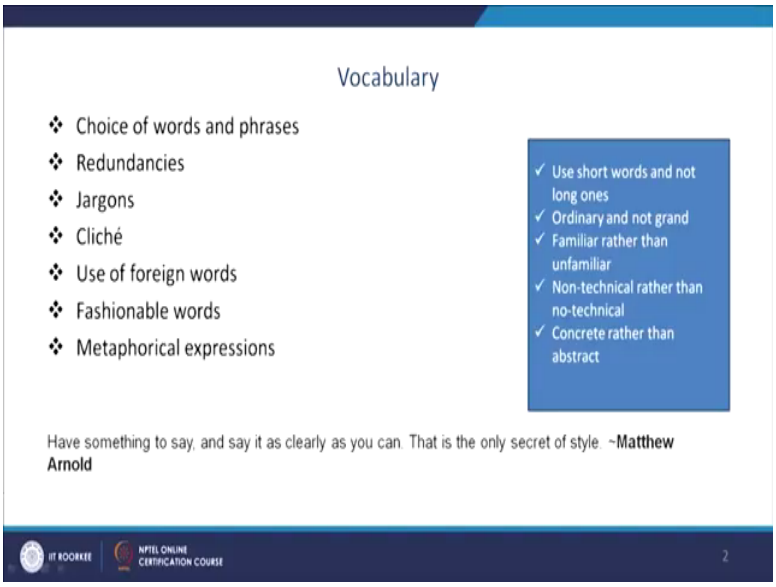

So, please use non technical words rather than technical words, and then one has also to see that one can use concrete words and not abstract words. We shall have certain examples which have been taken just to drive home our points, but before that let us find out what a very eminent poet named Matthew Arnold says about the style of writing. If you have something to say he says I have something to say and say it as clearly as you can that is only the secret of style, meaning thereby when you have to say something please say it very clearly in a very lucid manner in a manner that everyone can understand.

Now, we have already said that you have to use familiar words what is actually the difference between familiar and unfamiliar words. Unfamiliar words are those words for which a reader has either to cancel the dictionary or the thesaurus and naturally the smooth flow of reading is blocked. For example, here you can find the list of difficult words suppose somebody uses a word for comradery it will be difficult, if he can use a word like friendship that will be an

easier word decipher, I mean sometimes you will find many people writing I have already decipher no why cannot they say I have already discovered.

So, these are actually the words that actually tire the readers that actually irritate the readers, and then the words like euphoria, impassive, terminate, validate, veracity, kindred, synergy, emanate, even though all these words not only are correct standard, but then they are not familiar every reader cannot understand this word.

So, instead of euphoria if you can simply say happiness that will do instead of impasse one can say deadlock in instead of terminate one can say end instead of validate why do not we say prove instead of veracity let us say truth instead of kindred let us say the same instead of synergy let us say cooperation cooperate instead of emanate let us say issue.

I mean simply by providing an easy synonym to these words you can make your writing effective and not only effective, but understandable my dear friends, because when a reader is bound to read your report what actually he finds is that he wants an ease of reading and the ease of reading also depends upon the relationship between the reader and the writer, and most of the time as a writer of a document you do not know who your readers are that is why you have to go an extra mile.

Sometimes people also use many foreign words and unfamiliar words these foreign words once again irritate the readers and may be that they will not be able to read the entire document. In the box you can find a list of foreign words which may be difficult because most of these foreign words either are Latin or are, those which we do not come across in our everyday lives and that is why it can pose a difficulty.

When somebody says the reason they try it is always better to substitute that and say the most important reason to adjust. Many people often say it is an infra dig for me to discuss things with you it could always better be said it is below dignity.

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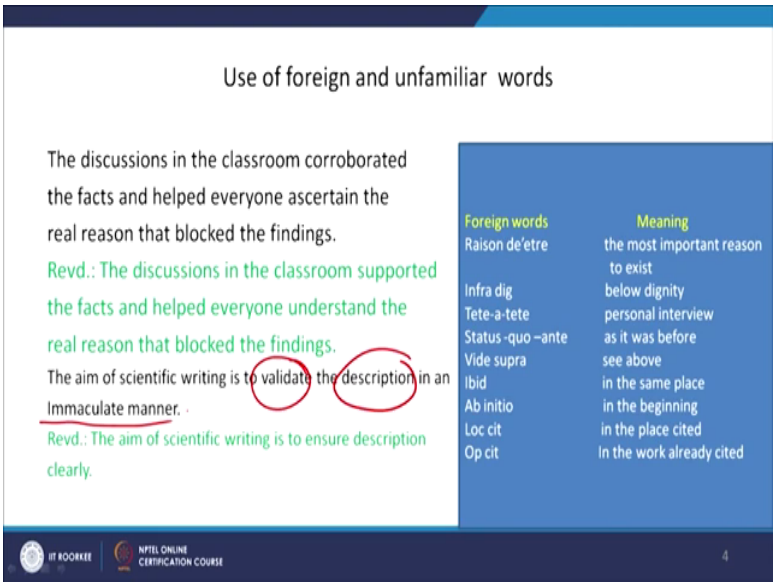

Then tete a tete then status quo ante vide supra op cit loc cit ab initio, I mean all these words are foreign words and they actually irritate the readers mind, there are examples also given for one we can take.

The aim of scientific writing is to validate the description clearly, now when you say this it is very clear it is very lucid, but instead of it if a writer says the art of scientific writing is to validate the description in an immaculate manner. So, you find there are three words which have been used and all these three words are difficult my dear friend; description, validate fine and then immaculate. So, it is always better to substitute these words and huge words which actually can be used to make people understand.

Now, since you are and many of you might be trying to enter a job or a profession you will find that once in a profession you actually get used to the use of words which are very

familiar in your profession, but when the same word is used for a person who is not from your profession then it be causes a difficulty this we term as jargon.

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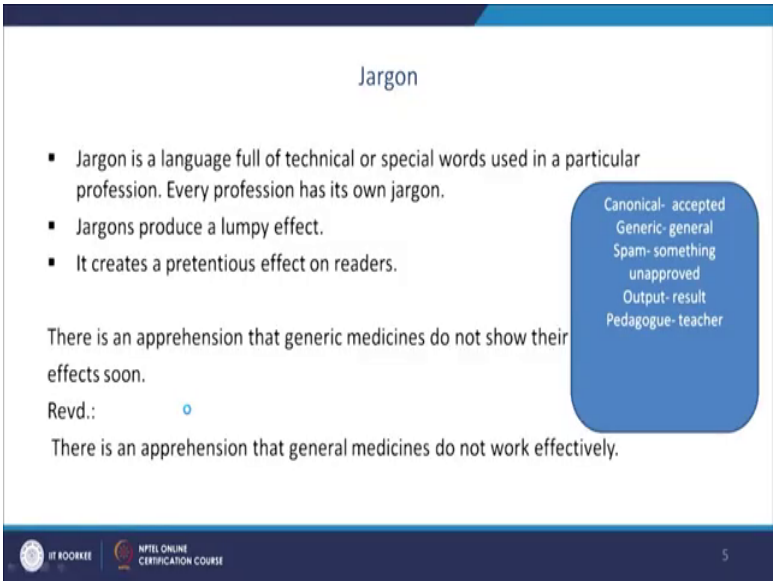

And this jargon is a language which is over technical too much of technical words special words.

In a particular profession it is ok, but then only the people of your profession can understand and every profession will have jargon whatever way you are working in whatever organization you are working in, if you are working in an organization where business is being dealt a business of computers say sometimes in another institution or organization where you are working with other things naturally you pick up the words which are very technical, but then it can cause a lot of difficulty to others when they have to read it out. And

in the box you can find that some jargons have been used you can find out some more jargons from your own field.

Canonical instead of saying canonical it is better to say accepted, instead of saying generic why cant we say general maybe people will not understand a computer person will most often use spam many people will always use output input. A teacher or somebody who is in education may be familiar with a word like pedagogue, but others cannot that is why one has to change and to change for the betterment of others we can take an example here. And one must also understand why we actually fall back upon the use of jargons.

Sometimes either to create your own position or to make certain show offs actually it is a sort of pretension you know as a writer you actually try to pretend that you know more, but then this is not going to do any benefit to the reader.

So, jargons actually produce a sort of lumpy effect, I mean a sort of effect which is very difficult it is it just like a lump a sort of thickness law which actually blocks the meaning, and creates a sort of pretences effect on readers are not able to understand and maybe they will form a different sort of opinion about the writer. Because the writers never know who are going to read their works and writing as I have been saying time and again writing actually represents the writer in his absence. Hence there should be an aim and aim for making things clear, for making things better, making things lucid. Another category of words that people often fall back upon is called cliche.

Now, what is the cliché? In any organization whenever you are working you know its sometimes or the other you have to draft something you have to draft a report or something like that, but then when you fall back upon the use of words which have become obsolete, which actually have been abandoned which actually have lost their effectiveness because of overuse such words are actually called cliche.

So, a cliche can be defined as a faded word or phrase which has lost its effectiveness because of overuse. Now there can be quite a good number of cliches I have simply picked some of

them for you have often heard many people saying, was there some food for thought in what he said now food for thought is a cliche.

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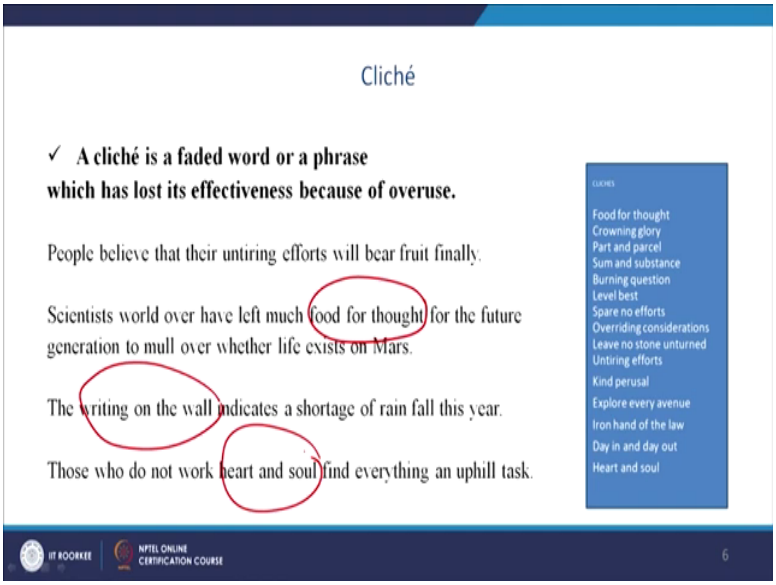

Many people often say crowning glory, part and parcel, fine level best some people often say overriding considerations spare no efforts and one thing that is very common among people are saying last but not the least. Sometimes people also carve out some new technical cliches for example, even they can also say things like prediction sorry writing on the wall, instead of saying writing on the wall why cannot they say predict. Because when they say writing on the wall actually not only does it become metaphorical, but then it also becomes a sort of cliche. So, cliche can also be called a sort of metaphoric writing where you unnecessarily tire the mind of the readers.

So, here are some examples given. For example, see scientist world over have left much food for thought so, food for thought is a cliche the writing on the wall it is better to say prediction then writing on the wall. Those who do not work heart and soul I mean these are needless now. So, it is only to be substituted by a familiar world now sometimes you will often hear people saying the sum and substance of what I want to say, why can not they say the essence of all that I want to say fine.

So, the question is we unnecessarily and this is you know this in a way can be considered to be a sort of lethargy on the part of writing, because the writer should think for and about the background of his readers only then he can make his writing clear. Another important ingredient that can tire the mind of readers is called redundancy, you have always heard people saying you have become redundant what actually does he mean he actually means that you have become useless. Likewise redundancy is also a device which is actually needless repetition to define it properly will be to say it is a sort of needless repetition.

So, redundancy is that part of the message which can be eliminated, which can actually be sacrificed, which can be controlled without any loss of information I mean even if there is no redundancy if you do not make use of redundant expressions even though the sentence is not going to be in effective.

So, we can come across a good number of redundant expressions you have often heard many people saying, the basic fundamentals of all is. Now the basic and the fundamentals those actually are the two words actually mean the same. So, it is it is simply a sort of needless repetition.

Some people often say the past memory so, if it is a memory it is always a past my dear friend, you have often heard many people saying the true facts of life.

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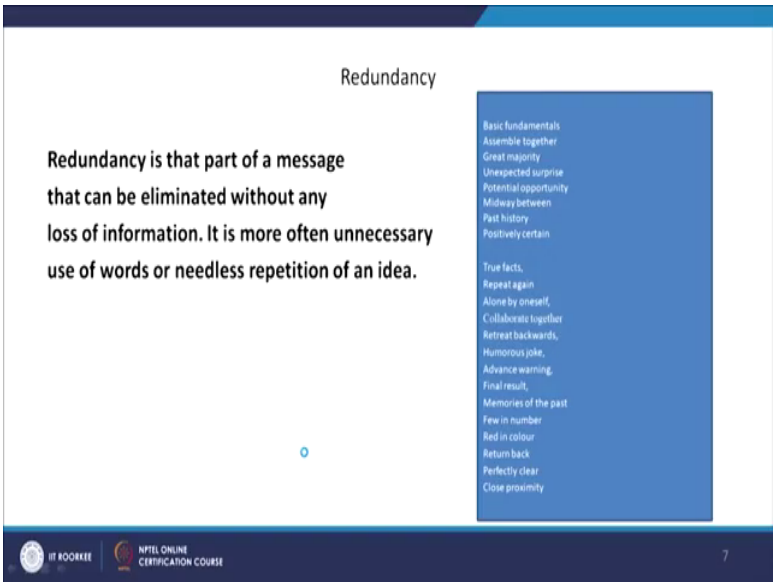

So, is there also the possibility of false facts of life? Many people often say, I am strongly certain and strongly convinced if you are convinced there is no question of being strongly you are already convinced. You have also heard many people saying the final decision will be taken so, is there going to be a semi final decision as well my dear friends.

So, you actually need to think over it and then you will find that people can avoid it. Has you not heard people saying oh it was such a humorous joke can there be a joke which can make you weeping also.

So, a humorous joke is a needless repetition likewise many people often say there is an advanced warning about this tsunami, there is an advanced warning about the earthquake, there is advanced warning about heavy rains, fine I mean a warning is a warning there is no question of saying advance and all that. So, these unnecessarily not only make your sentences

cumbersome repetitive, but then also add to the length of the paragraph which will actually cause difficulty to a reader when he is reading your report.

Hence one should always aim at controlling the use of redundant expressions. While writing a report one should always think about the aim, why are you writing this report? If you think that you are writing this report because you have to provide a solution to a problem naturally you would be thinking that what would be the best way so, that I can drive home my points.

And of course you have to say things clearly we have been saying state a thing as clearly as you can, there is no need of saying things in an indirect manner because we are not discussing literature my dear friend in literature you will find that there are so, many ways to say things, but then here you are talking about something very specific.

Hence when some people start making use of round about expressions which you can also call circumlocution expression, I mean an expression that keeps moving on and on yet saying nothing. So, one has to avoid the use of roundabout expressions and unusual phrasing. You will find that your report itself is longer and one makes one report thicker even by making one sentences longer, making one sentences as long as they can be and in that what happens you actually lose the meaning you lose the purpose.

So, some people think that instead of doing that why cannot we say things in a roundabout expression well man you can say that, but only in literature, not when you are writing something very objectively because report writing actually aims at objectivity. So, when you make use of roundabout expressions naturally you are not facilitating rather irritating the readers.

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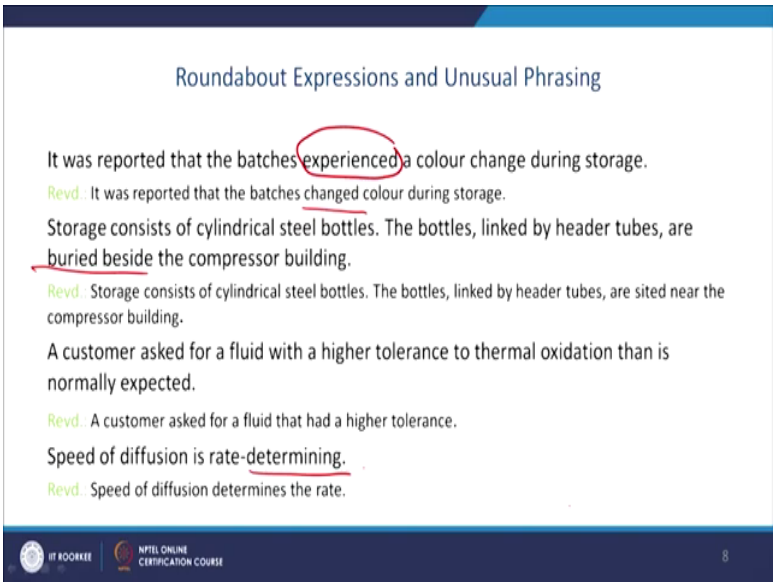

Here are some examples you can find out let us look at the first example. It was reported that the batches experienced a color change during a storage, now see the sentence is a small even though the sentence is a small or the use of the word experienced, now the use of the word experience actually makes it a sort of circumlocution. So, it can be made easier by saying it was reported that the batches changed.

Now, what did you do instead of these experienced word you simply brought a word that can facilitate meaning and you simply said changed. Likewise the second sentence also we can have a look at, storage consists of cylindrical steel bottles there is no problem with this. The bottles linked by a header tubes are buried beside the compressor building we have already been saying that instead of using abstract words please use concrete words.

So, the word buried here it actually is going to camouflage the expression it is going to hide the expression. So, it is better we change that and we can say storage can build consists of cylindrical steel bottles the bottles linked by heated tubes are sited near the compression building, that is what actually you wanted to say did not you yes.

So, what one should do is one should actually see how one achieves clarity because even when you are writing technically you are actually writing for somebody whom you are not seeing, who does not have the chance to seek explanations that is why let us try to make our writings as a specific as we can. The second the third sentence also is like that we can come to the last sentence which is actually, I have taken this sentence very willingly because this sentence is you see this is very shorter very shorter you know speed of diffusion is rate determining.

Now, what are you doing you are actually adding a you are adding what you are adding to the meaning, but then making it complicated by saying rate determining. So, it is better to make it say directly speed of diffusion determines the rate. I mean instead of bringing an objective that actually goes to say the meaning let us try to come to the verb I mean you have already understood earlier when we said, instead of nouns you can develop the habit of using verbs because verbs actually are action words and they help understand the meaning.

Next sometimes as you have been saying you are in an organization or you are going to join an organization, and after some time you will find that there are people who might be using certain abbreviations, it is fine in the organization because people know that.

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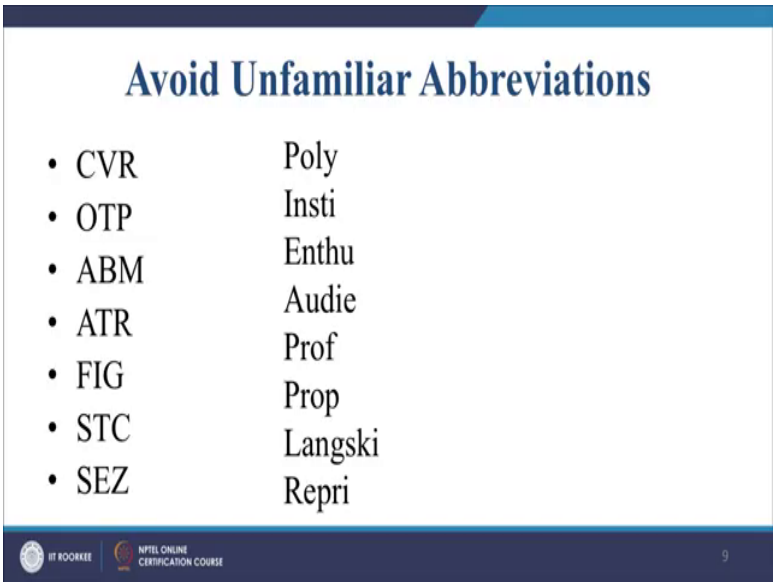

But then what about others would not be able to understand when you are going to use abbreviations or you are going to use short acronyms. Look at these words all these words are abbreviated once, but then do we know all of them no we do not, even when we guess we guess according to our own. So, it is always better if you are using it in your report so, you use it, but when you are using it for the first time please explain it.

For example the one is using CVR this is actually you know very technical Cockpit Voice Recorder fine, OTP even though it is very common most of the people might not be knowing it so, it is better to explain that ABM Anti Ballistic Missile ATR fine FIG Faculty Initiation Grants that is very popular here people here in our institution say fig. Have you got a grant from the fig, again this is another word STC are you doing an STC Short Term Course. Oh this is actually a report on SEZ a Special Economic Zone.

Now, all these words even though they appear very nice to hear, but then they may actually be very unpleasant when it goes to a reader who is not familiar with it, and if he starts searching for these words the reading will be blocked my dear friends. Likewise on the right hand side we have written certain acronyms which are actually mostly used in organizations and people of organizations only understand.

Poly polymer for polymer our students say poly, institute they call it insti, enthusiasm becomes enthu, audie is very famous all around the campus for auditorium, prof for professor, prop for proprietor, langski for language skills, repri for report writing, bio for biology fine. So, these are actually even though they appear to be very easy, but maybe not easier for others to understand because they are not exposed to such sorts of writing.

My dear friends when you are writing a report as I said earlier you are writing it for your readers, and a decision will be taken based on the findings of your report. And how can and the decision may be effected also, because a readers familiarity with words often helps him or her to understand what is in the report. And that is why we have been trying to achieve a sort of consistency, a sort of clarity, a sort of unity, a sort of coherence and that can be done when you are not only writing sentences, but you are also making paragraphs.

You will find that complex sentences often pose difficulty level and these complex sentences add to breathless paragraphs.

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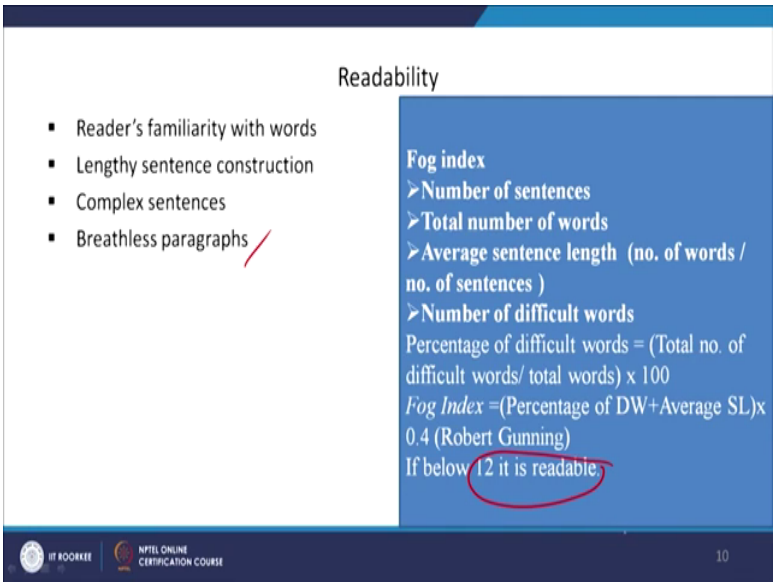

What do we mean by breathless paragraphs? A breathless paragraph is a paragraph where a reader when he starts reading is not in a position to take a breath and he is actually gasping for breath would you do this my dear friend, no not at all.

So, hence what should we do we should actually learn readability formula, this readability formula was coined by Robert Gunning in 1960s of course, nowadays because of the advances of technology computers and other things this readability formula also ought to change, but then we can in order to make our task easier understand what is our readability formula. A readability formula a Robert Gunning says he is actually based on fog index and he provides a formula of fog index and he says if the fog index is below twelve then any piece is considered readable.

Now, how to aim at it how to get it for that he provides the formula they take a piece of writing and try to gaze or measure the number of sentences total number of words and you should try to find out the average sentence length which can be found out by getting number of words divided by number of sentences, and when you get the average sentence length fine. Then you have to find out the percentage of the sentence length and that has to be multiplied by 0.4, and then you will get the readability then you will get the fog index.

So, this fog index if it is below 12 your piece is going to be readable you can aim at it my dear friends with some of the examples that I have told you. And unnecessarily enough people not only make their sentences clumsy, but they also make their paragraphs lengthy, how compound sentences as we have been saying not only irritate the readers it actually blocks the readers comfort zone, comfortability, comfortability in terms of reading isnt it. That is why one has to go for writing simple sentences which can not only provide variety as well as flexibility. Here there is an example you can read it at your own laser and you can find the sentence appears to be very longer.

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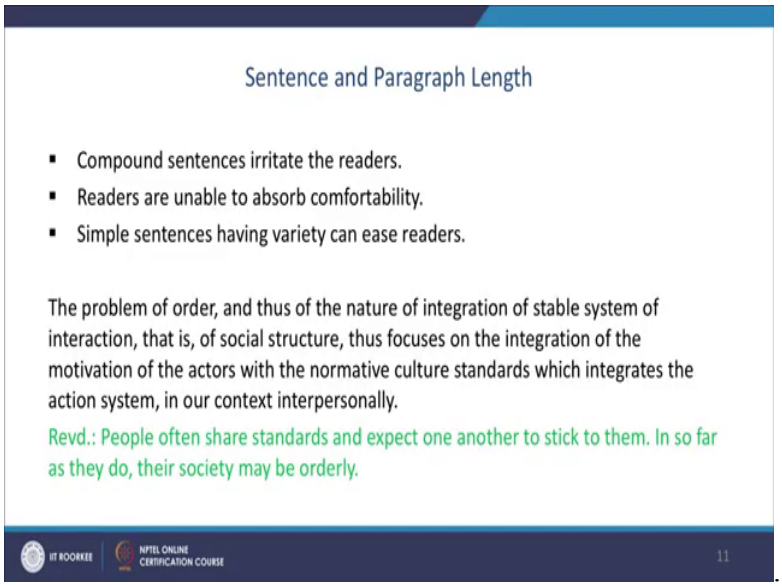

But then if you can divide their sentence because this sentence can also be considered to be a sort of breathless, because the sentence does not have an end it is only one sentence, but what we can do is we can break the sentence in to two split the sentence into two and then see that if there are repetitions those repetitions are said a goodbye to and we can make our sentence effective.

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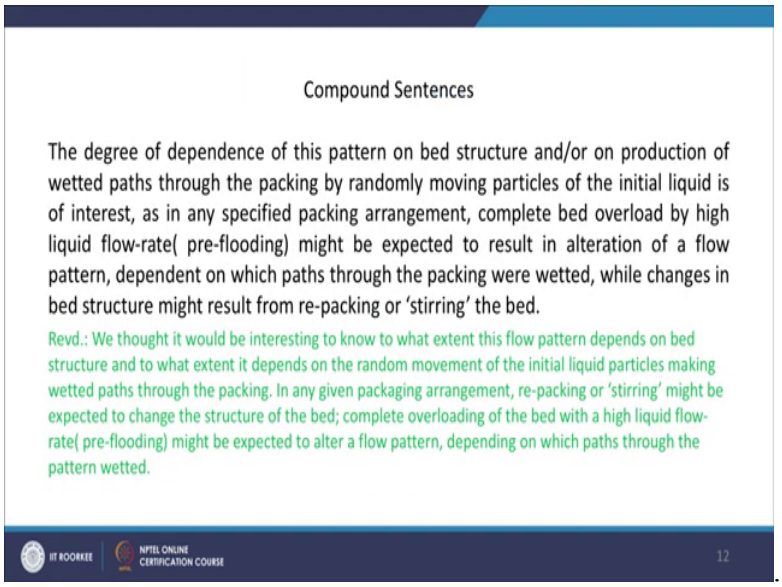

Not only sentences become cumbersome, but paragraphs also become cumbersome, how have a look at it. This is this is an example from a scientific writing. The degree of dependence of this pattern on bed structure and or production of weighted paths through packing by randomly moving particles of the initial liquid is of interest as in any specified packing arrangement complete bed overload by high liquid flow rate, I mean the writer has unnecessarily made it packed.

What actually he wants to say he wants to write is not clear. So, what can be done, it can actually be made simpler not only by splitting, but by keeping those words intact because their technical terms which you cannot remove, and one should not remove the technical terms, but one can always try ones best to make the technical information easier.

So, if one says we thought it would be interesting to know now see we thought it would be interesting to know now this actually incites the readers interest, to what extent this flow pattern depends on bed structure and to what extent it depends on the random movement of the initial liquid particles making wetted paths through the packing.

In any given package packaging arrangement, repacking of stirring or stirring might be expected to change the structure of the bed complete overloading of the bed with a high liquid flow rate might be expected to alter a flow pattern depending on which paths through the pattern wetted. Sometimes it so, happens that this can be divided into two or three for example, you can say it also consists off it also divides so, but then that will become too ordinary.

So, one should neither sacrifice the comfortability, but one should also see that sentences are standard, and if sentences are a standard brief simple and it actually facilitates the reading the paragraphs also will become readable my dear friends. And in order to make your paragraphs readable also you should try to make use of transitions.

Now, what are these transitions you might be thinking transitions actually are made use of in the paragraph. It actually because as we have been saying that any paragraph will become effective only when there is a sort of unity we have already discussed earlier you remember well unity coherence and then sequence.

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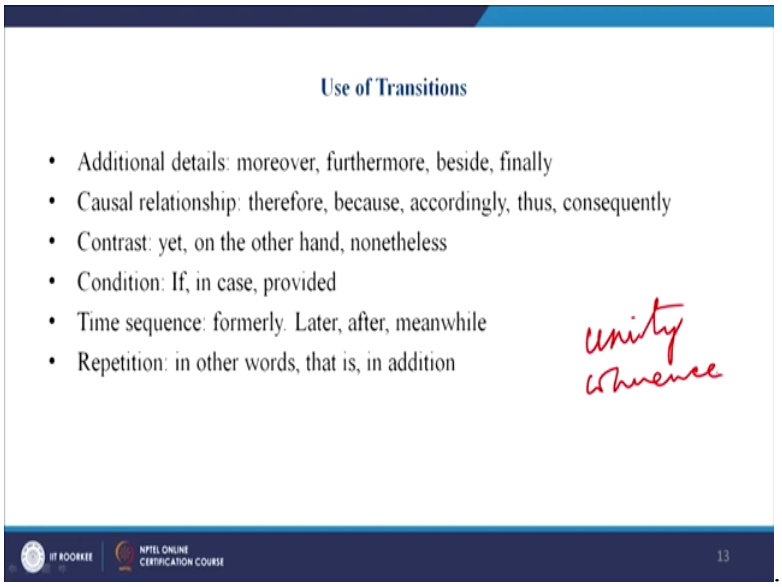

So, one sentence should be connected to the other subordination, coordination we have been talking about, and this can be provided by making use of transitions. I mean one sentence you have already said, but you want to say something more so, there are additional details you can always say moreover furthermore beside besides finally.

Then you want to show some relationship, because every paragraph in the sentence is related it actually there is a sort of relationship between the sentences. Sometimes you want to make a sentence based on cause and effect sometimes there can be a condition and you can say if, in case, subject to, provide it like that. Sometimes you also want to create a sort of time sequence so, later, after in the beginning in the end in the middle like that and then sometimes you also can repeat in other words, that is, in addition.

Now, what these do these transitions when you are making use of they actually lessen the burden of readers and this provides also a sort of relief to the readers. And you want your writing to be read, and if you want your writing to be read naturally because you are going to make use of a technical document and you are going to make it readable hence make use of transitions, that will actually make your task easier.

My dear friends as I have been saying writing is not one day affair is not it has actually to be practiced, and one who is writing and specially writing for a purpose, writing with a purpose and writing to make others understand should see that meaning is reflected the way he is writing, his meaning is reflected the way he is writing and having the purpose in mind the purpose is that you have to provide a solution to a problem.

So, let us come to see what the veteran English writer of eighteenth century Doctor Johnson, Doctor Samuel Johnson says, a man who uses a great many words to express his meaning is like a bad marksman I mean a person who does not have proper aim who instead of aiming a single stone at an object takes up a handful and throws at it in hopes he may hit.

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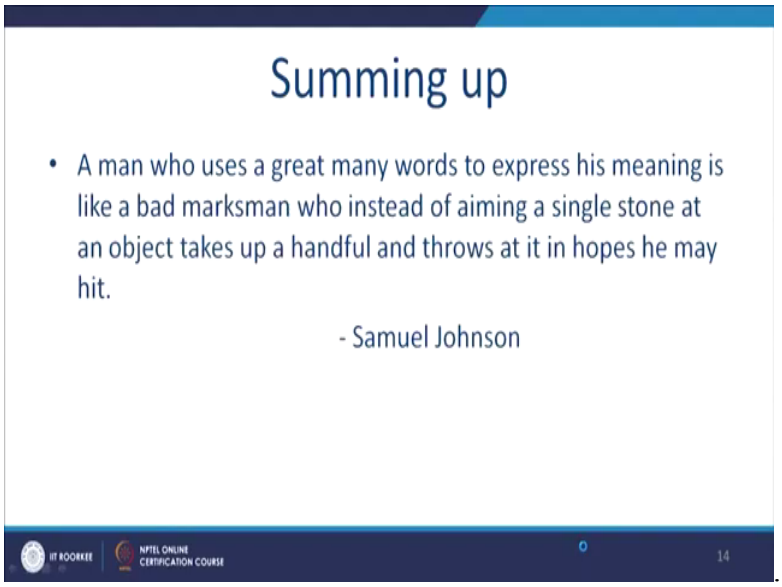

Now, when you want to hit something you actually have an objective and this objective can be met only when the aim is concentrated, likewise when you have planned to make your things understood by others you actually have to bear in mind the clarity. You actually have to bear in mind the background of the reader and to ensure that everyone can understand it is always better to use a language that is familiar, to use a language that can be understood by everyone, to use a language for which people do not have to struggle, because when they struggle they are going to block or you are going to block their thought.

My dear friends I hope by this lecture you might have been able to understand how you can aim at clarity. And most of the technical writing can be understood and can enable people to take action based on what has been found and not only found, but what is feasible, any

conclusion that you provide through your report can enable a person to take action based on if he is convinced or if he is not.

And I hope you are actually trying to convince people with the help of your clear crystal and lucid writing. So, aim at clarity aim at lucidity and aim at meaning and meaning lies with you with the writer and as a writer of whatever documents you will try to keep all these things into consideration and write better write effective.

Thank you very much, I wish you all a good day.