

# Topic 7 Section 3

# Written Communication

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# Written Communication Skills

The ability to communicate effectively in writing is an important skill that most supervisors will use every day in the workplace. Here are few basic rules that will help you in improving your written skills:

- Write concisely, using a style and tone that suits the receiver
- Keep sentences short and language simple
- Provide only the information that the reader needs to know
- Use technical terms and jargon only if you know the receiver is familiar with them
- Check spelling (use spell check if writing is done on a computer word processor)
- Always use active voice (not passive) when structuring a sentence

## Example

Passive voice—The final trim was carried out by using the Cat 16H grader.

Active voice— The Cat 16H Grader carried out the final trim.

- Each paragraph should introduce a new idea or topic
- Use correct punctuation to present a professional and readable document

The following sections will elaborate on some of these rules.

## Punctuation

The following table shows some common punctuation marks and describes their use.

Symbol	Name	Description and Examples
.	Full stop	Used to end a sentence. <i>The grader driver completed the final trim.</i>
,	Comma	Used to separate parts of a sentence. <i>Spreading is usually done in layers, as it provides better soil compaction.</i>
:	Colon	Used to announce a clause or list. <i>Inspect all machinery for the following defects: broken or cracked seals, fouled plugs and clogged oil filters.</i>
;	Semi colon	Used to pull together and contrast two clauses that have linking subject matter. <i>Scrapers can dump and spread spoil in one action; graders can only spread material.</i>
‘ ’	Quotation marks	Used to enclose the exact words of a writer or speaker. <i>The judge found that the accident was caused by ‘gross negligence’ on the driver’s part.</i>
-	Hyphen	Used to link words to form compound words. <i>Left-handed</i>
?	Question mark	Used to indicate that the sentence is asking a question. <i>Is that what the contract requires?</i>
’	Apostrophe	Used with nouns to show possession e.g. Tom’s hat or in abbreviated words. <i>The driver’s actions caused the works to be delayed by several months.</i>

Punctuation is important. If it is missing, or is placed in a haphazard manner, it can change the meaning of a sentence to something that was not intended. Some examples follow to illustrate these points:

- Lack of punctuation:

- Incorrect:

After they met the union and the senior manager Ms McTiernan decided to continue the negotiations

- Correct

After they met, the union and the senior manager, Ms. McTiernan, decided to continue the negotiations.

- Wrong punctuation mark:

- Incorrect

The superintendent asked why the subgrade had gone over cost?

- Correct

The superintendent asked why the subgrade had gone over cost.

- Poorly placed punctuation:

- Incorrect

A serious attempt by the company managers to remedy this state of affairs, would demonstrate how importantly they regard workplace safety.

- Correct

A serious attempt by the company managers to remedy this state of affairs would demonstrate how importantly they regard workplace safety.

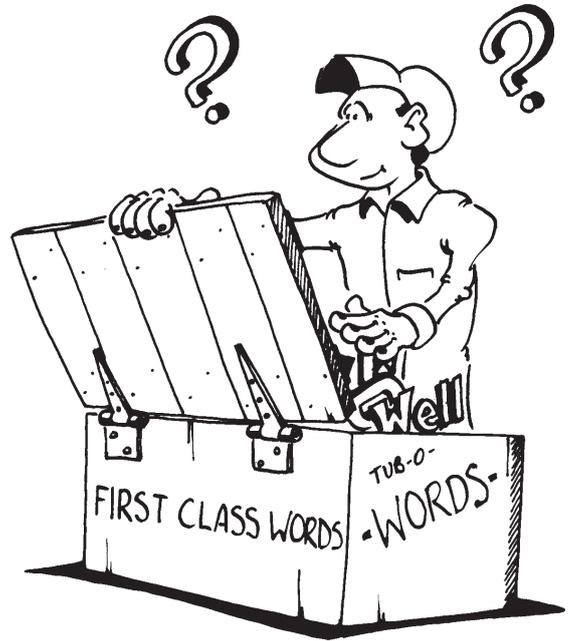
## Word Choice

Whenever you write anything you need to make sure that you are aiming the language at the right level to suit your readers. If you write at a high level, you run the risk that your audience will not understand what you are trying to convey. If you write at a level that is too low, you may alienate your readers by insulting their educational levels. In either case, your readers will lose interest and what you have written will be lost to them.

## Two-cent Words

The simple rule to remember is to use ‘two-cent’ words rather than ‘two-dollar’ words. The following list shows a small sample of two-dollar words that have a two-cent equivalent or near equivalent:

- Abundance — lot; many
- Automobile — car
- Commence — begin
- Enormous — large
- In view of the fact — because
- Initial; initially — first
- Initiate — start; begin
- Magnitude — size; capacity; etc
- Utilise — use
- Vestigial — remaining.



## Unnecessary Words

Always avoid the use of phrases that ‘pad out’ sentences without adding any meaning. For example—

- At this point in time— now
- It is my personal opinion— I think
- In the opinion of the writer— I think
- As far as I am concerned— I think (or delete altogether)
- For all intents and purposes— I think (or delete altogether)
- For the purpose of— for
- In order to— to
- Until such time as— until
- Due to the fact that— because
- In the event that— if
- All things considered— (delete)
- For the most part— (delete)
- Last but not least— (delete)
- More or less— (delete)

## Jargon

Another area where word choice can affect the quality of your writing is in the use of clichés, buzzwords, abbreviations and jargon. If you choose this type of word in your texts, you are using ‘weasel words’. Using weasel words can have the effect of leaving the reader alienated by the text or in the dark about what is intended by the writer. Take, for example, the following sentence:

In the near future, the stakeholders will initiate and implement a BS 33 which will lead to favourable outcomes and achievements with regard to the Pro-Ed system that the Department is seeking to establish before the third registration period.

Although grammatically correct, a sentence like this is useless, and means nothing to most readers. It is full of clichés, buzzwords and jargon and the meaning would only be apparent to some insiders — and even that is doubtful. If any of your sentences are as opaque as this one, you need to rethink what you are trying to say and then say it clearly.

Another problem that may arise from the use of jargon is the possibility that the same word can have different meanings, depending on context.

An example of a word that has caused problems with contracts in the construction industry is ‘profile’. This word may have either of two meanings, depending on the context in which it is used:

- (as a noun) a drawing describing the shape of the cross-section of the road formation
- (as a verb) to remove bitumen from a road surface by using a special machine (i.e. a profiler).

Without additional information to accurately describe the context, the meaning of a clause in a construction contract such as “Profile the road surface to the specified shape”

may be uncertain or even meaningless. If the intention is to strip a specified depth of bitumen from the road surface, the term ‘milling’ may be more appropriate.

## Appropriate Language

The important point to remember about all business writing is to use the language that is appropriate to the situation. In most business writing, this means avoiding colloquialisms (informal use of words). For example, 'great' for good; 'fantastic' for excellent. In business, clear but formal writing usually achieves the best results.

Your company's policies on written communication are an important guide to appropriate language. In addition, your supervisor may have preferences for particular types of expression. These should be taken into account, especially if you are drafting letters for the supervisor's signature.

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**Note!**

Don't 'let off steam' in writing. You will regret it later, when you are feeling calmer.

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## Memos

Memos are a form of brief, written messages that allow people to communicate in the workplace in a manner that is simple, direct and concise. Memos are usually informal but can also be used to transmit brief formal messages. They are only used internally within an organisation as letters are used to transmit information to external bodies.

The format of a memo is similar to that of a letter in that it must indicate to whom the memo is addressed to, who it is from, the date and a subject line that describes the purpose of the memo. Unlike a letter, it does not have details of address, greetings and a full signature. A typical memo is shown below:

MEMORANDUM	
To:	All Supervisors
From:	Tom Grey, Operations Manager
Date:	15 January 2004
Subject:	Holiday Leave Planning
<p>Holiday leave schedules for all employees are currently being prepared.</p> <p>Please ensure that all leave applications from your departments are submitted before the end of this month.</p>	

## Letters

Letters are written at work for a number of reasons. Some are written to ask for information, some to give information and some do both of these. Letters may also be written to thank people, to persuade or to complain. The tone of a letter may be friendly if it is addressed to a friend or close colleague and official or neutral if sent to a client or government department but should never be discourteous or offensive.

The success of a business letter depends on whether or not it brings about the response that the writer intended. It is therefore important that the structure and contents of the letter are carefully constructed to give it the best chance of success. There are a number of logical steps that a letter writer can take to maximise the effectiveness of this type of communication. The first step is to plan the letter and the second is to structure the layout and contents of the letter to create a positive impression and influence the reader to accept your ideas.

Not all companies use the same layout for letters. For this reason, always check that you are using the current, approved format. If you are not sure which format is correct, ask.

## Planning the Letter

### *Identify the person who is to receive the letter*

Take the time to ensure that the letter is being sent to the right person. It is a waste of effort to write a great letter if it is sent to a person who is not in a position to do anything about it.

Check to make sure that the details that you have are correct. The receiver may not be impressed if their name is spelt incorrectly, if their title or position is wrong or if the letter is sent to the wrong address.

If you are sending the letter on stationery under the company letterhead, firstly make sure from your manager that you have approval to do so. This may be particularly important in situations where you are writing, for instance, to a government department regarding an issue that could end up in court. It is always best to get approval before sending any letters containing material that may be contentious.

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#### **Note!**

*Depending on your company's policies, you may need to confirm the content of a letter with the Project Manager before sending it. In some companies, the Project Manager must sign all outgoing correspondence.*

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### *List your reasons for writing*

Clarify in your own mind the reasons why are you writing the letter. Determine what action you want the reader to take after they have read your letter. Sometimes letters are written for a single purpose, for example, to cancel a subscription to a magazine. More commonly, letters are written for more than one reason. As an example, a supervisor may write a letter to the client with one of the following goals in mind:

- Thank the client for sending the last payment promptly
- Inform the client of a request for changes to the schedule
- Give a brief update on progress
- Confirm your attendance at the next planned meeting
- Include the current invoice - as an enclosure

### *Plan the letter's contents*

When planning the content of the letter, keep in mind the goals that you have identified and make sure that they are clearly stated in a way that the reader can understand and hopefully agree with. In other words, put yourself in the reader's position and try to frame the letter to achieve the response that you desire.

In the example given above, a number of the items are routine in nature but the main issue could be the need to get the client's approval for changes to the schedule. The reasons for the changes should be clearly outlined along with the possible outcomes. Be sure to state your case in such a way that the client can see the benefits of the changes and has enough information to make a decision.

## Structure the Layout and Contents of the Letter

The layout of the letter is important in that it indicates to the receiver at first glance that the letter is professionally presented and will hopefully cause him/her to deal with it promptly. Most companies or organisations have adopted a standard form of letter or corporate style of presentation so that there is some consistency in their correspondence. If you need to send letters to clients or other people, it is a good idea to gather some typical examples of company letters as a guide to help you in writing your own.

The full block style of presentation is most commonly used for business letters. This style aligns all text in the letter to the left-hand side of the page. It also uses an open style of punctuation; that is, the absence of commas and full stops in the date and address sections of the letter. Normal punctuation is still used in the body of the letter. An example letter will be included to demonstrate all of the topics that are discussed in detail below.

The letter should be composed using a plain English writing style that makes it easy to read and understand. The use of too many big words and inappropriate jargon or technical terms should be avoided. Use short paragraphs and let the ideas 'flow'.

A business letter consists of up to ten parts as listed and discussed below:

- Letterhead
- Date
- Reader's address
- Attention line (optional)
- Greeting
- Subject line (optional)
- The body of the letter
- Close
- Writer's signature and job title
- Enclosures and copies(optional)

The sample letter on page 11 illustrates some general rules relating to the layout of a typical business letter.

### *Letterhead*

The letterhead identifies the company that you are representing and it also includes information about the company such its address and phone number. It may also include other information such as the company logo, website and email address.

If a letterhead is not used then the letter writer should instead list the following information, each on a separate line:

- Writer's name
- Position
- Company
- Address

### *Date*

The date is placed two lines below the letterhead and should be shown in the format:

'6 January 2004'. The numeral-only format 06/01/04 should not be used as this can be misinterpreted. An American reader may understand this date as being the first day of the sixth month. By spelling the month in letters this confusion can be avoided.

Numerals only are used in specifying the day of the month i.e. '6 January' not '6<sup>th</sup> January'.

### *Attention Line*

The attention line is optional and identifies the title or position of the person that the letter is addressed to. For example, the attention line may direct the letter to the attention of the General Manager, Accounts Department or Projects Supervisor of the company. The attention line is placed two lines below the date and the person's name may follow the word 'Attention' as shown below:

'Attention: The General Manager'

### *Reader's Address*

The reader's address is placed two lines below the date - or attention line if used. The reader's postal address is most commonly used here and this information is used to address the envelope that contains the letter. In some cases, the reader's business address may be used and this can be different to the postal address.

### *The Greeting*

The greeting is placed two lines below the reader's address and identifies the person that the letter is meant for. The standard greeting includes a salutation, such as 'Dear Sir' or 'Dear Madam'. Whether or not you use the receiver's first name, e.g. 'Dear Bill,' or a more formal greeting, such as 'Dear Mr Jones' will depend on the type of letter and your personal relationship to the receiver.

If you are not sure whether the receiver is a male or a female, the letter may be addressed 'Dear Sir/Madam' or 'Dear Sir or Madam'. Alternatively, you may use a non-gender specific greeting such as 'Dear Dr Jones' where applicable.

A letter that is addressed to a woman may use the salutation "Dear Mrs Brown" or 'Dear Ms Brown'. If you are in doubt as to the person's marital status, it is preferable to use the term 'Ms' which is used to identify the person as female, in the same way that 'Mr' identifies a male, without indicating marital status.

### *Subject Line*

Sometimes a subject line is placed two lines below the greeting. Its purpose is to quickly identify the letter's purpose or subject. It should be a single line and contain less than about ten words. The words may be highlighted using bold style so that they stand out.

### *The Body of the Letter*

The body of the letter usually has three parts – the opening, the middle and the closing sections.

The opening section introduces the writer to the receiver if the letter is the first communication between the two parties. If the communication is ongoing then the opening should link the letter to previous discussions. Either way, the opening paragraph should be courteous and should explain briefly what the letter is about. It should also catch the reader's

attention and create interest so that they are encouraged to read further.

The middle part of the letter may contain a number of paragraphs and it is important that each paragraph is constructed around a specific point. A two-line spacing is used to separate each paragraph. These paragraphs will contain the information that the writer wishes to transmit to the receiver. The information should be presented in a manner that is clear and concise. It should be expressed in a way that is to-the-point, easy to understand and it should encourage the reader to take the action that you are recommending.

The closing section indicates what future action is expected and if necessary, it may specify times or dates. It also ends the letter in a courteous way and might invite the reader to contact you, if he/she has any questions about the contents of the letter.

### *Close*

The closing of the letter is placed two lines below the last line of the body and most commonly uses the phrase 'Yours sincerely'. Other salutations such as 'Yours truly' or 'Kind regards' are sometimes used depending on circumstances. The expression 'Yours faithfully' is not so commonly used now but was usually used with the greeting phrase 'Dear Sir or Madam'.

### *Writer's Signature and Job Title*

Business letters must be signed and it is usual to write the writer's name below the signature so that it is clear to the letter receiver who the writer is. Often the job title or position of the writer is included on the line below the writer's name although this is optional if the receiver is well known to the writer. Sufficient space should be left between the closing salutation and the writer's name for the signature to be made. This space is sometimes three, or usually four lines.

### *Enclosures and Copies (optional)*

If any documents are sent with the letter then these can be listed on the bottom of the page. A description of the document is written following the abbreviation 'Enc.' as in the example: 'Enc. Invoice No.6274, Dated 6 January 2004'. The abbreviation 'cc' is used to indicate that copies of the letter have been sent to file or to another person or department. An example would be 'cc: General Manager'. Details of enclosures and/or copies are listed two lines below the writer's name or job title.

<i>Letterhead</i>	 <p><b>Acme Construction Company</b> 325 Ipswich Road Brisbane Qld 4010 Telephone (07) 3465 2348</p> 
<i>Date</i>	6 January 2004
<i>Reader's Address</i>	Mr James White 48 Edward Street Brisbane Qld 4000
<i>Subject Line</i>	<b>Re: Changes to schedule</b>
<i>Greeting</i>	Dear James
<i>Body of the Letter</i>	<p>I am writing to advise you of our intention to propose a few minor changes to the schedule that we believe will eliminate potential problems with material supply and lead to an earlier completion of the contract. Also, we wish to thank you for receipt of payment for our last invoice #6035, dated 6 December 2003.</p> <p>The proposed changes to the schedule have been documented and costed and we will present this information for discussion at the next site meeting. In the meantime, I have enclosed a summary of the changes so that you will time to consider the implications and see the benefits of our proposal. We believe that if these changes are agreed to, we can avoid some delays and make substantial savings in both time and cost.</p> <p>Work on the project is progressing well and is on schedule at this time despite some rain last weekend. We do not anticipate any delays or problems in the short term and will confirm this in the progress report that we will submit at the meeting.</p> <p>I wish to confirm that the meeting has been booked for 8:30 am on 11 January in the usual venue and that I will be attending along with the other site supervisors. I look forward to seeing you there. I have enclosed the current invoice #6274 for your approval and action.</p>
<i>Close</i>	Yours Sincerely
<i>Writer's Signature and Job Title</i>	Henry Blake Supervisor
<i>Enclosures and Copies</i>	cc: General Manager Contract File
	Enc. Proposed changes to schedule - summary Invoice No.6274 Dated 6 January 2004'

## Email

The word email is a contraction of the two words ‘electronic mail’ and is a modern means of communication that has expanded rapidly all over the world since the early 1990s. Email is now used widely in the construction industry. An email message is a type of memo that is composed within a form that is available in a number of computer programs. The memo is then transmitted directly from the writer’s computer to another computer over a local area network or may be transmitted to anywhere in the world over the Internet.

### Advantages and Disadvantages of Email

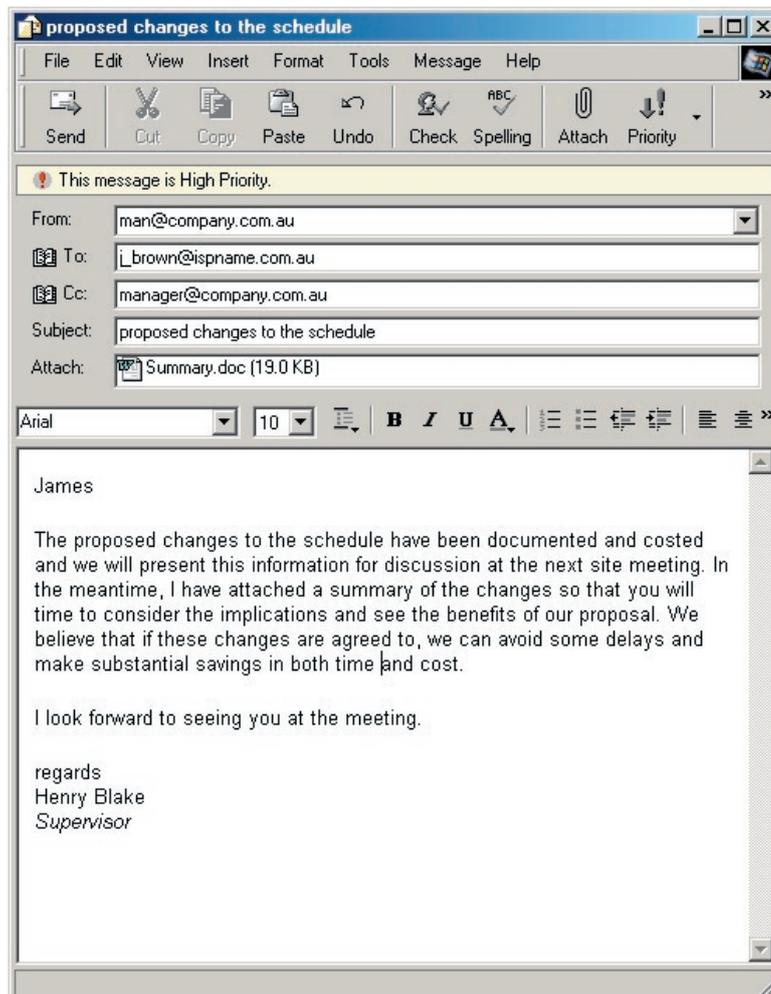
The use of email messaging can provide an alternative to letters, memos, telephone calls, faxes and personal meetings. Emails provide an informal means of communication that is quick and easy to use. The table below outlines some of the advantages and disadvantages of emails against more traditional methods of sending messages.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emails are quick and easy to write</li> <li>• Cheap and easy to send – no paper, envelopes or stamps</li> <li>• Fast delivery – almost instant anywhere in the world</li> <li>• Can be easily saved, stored and retrieved</li> <li>• Message can be easily copied to multiple receivers</li> <li>• Can be used within or between organisations</li> <li>• Email receiver can reply instantly, store email on computer or print it out</li> <li>• Messages can be sent or received outside of normal business hours or from remote locations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Message cannot be verified by handwritten signature</li> <li>• Not suitable for many formal or official messages</li> <li>• Of no use if receiver does not check email inbox or have computer access</li> <li>• In most cases, is not a secure method of sending confidential or sensitive information</li> <li>• Email system open to abuse if users flood the system with useless data</li> <li>• Messages can be used to deliver a virus to receiver’s computer</li> <li>• Some people are not familiar with this use of technology</li> <li>• Open to misuse or personal usage</li> </ul>

## Creating an Email Message

The format of an email message may vary slightly depending on the program used but the main all features of the programs are similar. As a typical example, the steps involved in sending an email using Microsoft Outlook Express© are as follows:

- Open the email program and select ‘Create Mail’ from the toolbar.
- Fill in the address of the person that you are sending the email to in the ‘To:’ area. If you wish to send the message to more than one person, separate each address with a comma or a semicolon (;). The address must be in the correct format, for example, — j\_brown@ispname.com.au



### Typical Email

If you have previously sent or received an email from this address, it may be selected from the Address Book which is the icon showing an open book to the left of the word ‘To’.

- To send the message to others, add their addresses into the box marked ‘Cc’ or click on the Address Book and select the names. All of these names and addresses will be visible to other receivers.
- Copies of the email can be sent to others using the ‘Bcc’ box and in this case, only the receiver and the sender can see to whom the message was sent to. The description ‘Bcc’ may be interpreted as ‘blind copies’.

- In the ‘Subject’ box type in a short descriptive message title.
- Type your message, and then click ‘Send’ to forward the email.

If you want to send more detailed information such as a letter or a report then this can be sent with the email as an attachment. To send an attachment with an email message, click on the attachment icon (a paperclip) on the toolbar. This will bring up a box called ‘Insert Attachment’ and you will have to type in or locate the name of the file that you wish to attach, enter it and then click on the ‘Attach’ button.

Email messages can be marked with a priority symbol. Using the ‘Priority’ icon on the toolbar, select High, Normal or Low Priority and click on it to set the rating.

## The E-Mail Difference

E-mail is different from other forms of communication; in particular:

- it is more conversational than letters or memos
- the sender can obtain instant feedback from the receiver
- it is less effective in conveying the emotional context of a message than either face-to-face or telephone communication
- what the sender sees may not be the same as what the receiver gets, depending on whether the receiver’s e-mail software is the same as the sender’s.

For these and other reasons, the use of e-mail as if it was a letter, memo or fax is not recommended. Instead, it is worthwhile to learn some of the habits and customs that have developed as more and more people around the world use e-mail.

## Using Email Effectively

Numerous manuals and texts about ‘how to use e-mail’ are now available. Many of these contain valuable suggestions. A number of recommended, e-mail focused websites are shown in the List of Websites at the conclusion of this Topic. These, in turn, lead to lists of books and more websites about e-mail.

However, anything about sending and receiving e-mail that looks like a rule or code of practice is not ‘Set in Stone’. Customs for using e-mail are still developing, and the only statement that can be made for certain is that they will change over time. It is advisable to consult some of the reference sources (such as the listed websites), but the only sure way to learn good e-mail usage is to actually use it. It is a case of ‘the more you practice, the more you will learn’.

The following paragraphs give a few suggestions for effective use of e-mail. However, these are suggestions only. Nothing substitutes for experience. In addition, what is ‘cool’ today may well be ‘daggy’ tomorrow.

## Context

Paper-based communication usually gives the receiver some indication of the context of the message. For example, a letterhead provides the context for a business letter and a birthday greeting is written on a birthday card. However, an e-mail message includes no clear indicators of context. It is therefore a good idea to give the receiver some clues. For example:

If you started and ended a message with the following, the receiver would clearly understand that it was a business message:

(Start) Re: Second Excavator for Redlands Job

(End) John McNamara

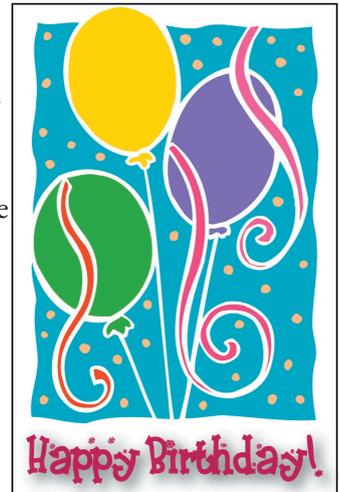
Manager Earthmoving Plant

PlantHire Pty Ltd

Phone 07 3456 7890

Fax 07 3456 6789

email: [jmacnam@planthire.com.au](mailto:jmacnam@planthire.com.au)



However, if you started and ended with the following, the receiver would clearly understand that it was an informal message:

(Start) Hey IncredibleHulk

(End) Teaser

Of the two forms of ending shown above, the first would be inappropriate if you were simply inviting someone to lunch. The second would be appropriate if you knew the person well and the setting for the exchange of e-mails was informal.

## Subject Line

The subject line is more important in an e-mail than in other written communication. If you write an informative subject line, the receiver can immediately understand what the message is about and whether it is important or not. For example, if you are trying to tell the job manager that you need 500 cubic metres of 20 mm Mary River gravel by next Tuesday, the subject line might be:

Need 500/20mm MR gravel by Tues

This will make sure that the receiver can understand what you need from the subject line alone, even if the remainder of the message does not get through. The receiver can then reply to confirm your request or seek more information from you.

However, you can make the message more useful for the receiver by adding a few more pieces of information. For example, a subject line stating:

**URGENT: Need 500/20mm MR gravel by Tues**

would straight away indicate to the receiver that this is an urgent request. A subject line stating:

**REQ: 500/20mm MR gravel by Tues**

tells the receiver that this is a routine request (as opposed to a FYI, for your information, or URGENT).

## *Emphasis*

It is pointless to use bold or italics as a means of emphasizing a point in an e-mail. Either of these may not come across on your receiver's software, or may show up as annoying formatting symbols.

Instead, you can add emphasis in a variety of other ways:

The grader was **Out Of Action** being serviced all last week

— Initial Capitals indicate light emphasis

The grader was **\*out of action\*** being serviced all last week

— asterisks around words have the same effect

**!!!DON'T START!!!** the final trim yet, wait till I've had a look at the problem with the grader blade.

— CAPITALS and exclamation marks add emphasis where it is needed

However, constructing a message entirely of capitals is rarely a good idea, as it is tedious to read and may give the wrong impression.

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**Remember!**

*Using ALL CAPITALS in an e-mail message is the equivalent of shouting.*

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For example, the following would be completely inappropriate if you were sending your boss a routine report:

**THE GRADER WAS OUT OF ACTION BEING SERVICED ALL LAST WEEK.**

The important point is not to use all capitals in the whole or part of an e-mail message unless there are strong reasons for doing so.

### *Attachments*

It is often useful to attach a document that you have referred to in an e-mail, so that the receiver can also refer to it. However, it is pointless to send large documents by e-mail, as they will probably not get through. Ten megabytes (10Mb) is about the limit for many office e-mail systems.

### *Keeping It Short and Sweet*

Your receiver will have to use the scroll bars if the message is too long. This is not a big issue if he or she gets only a few e-mails, but could be an annoyance and give the person a poor impression if he or she is dealing with dozens of e-mails a day. In addition, because of the formatting limitations of many e-mail programs, it is better to adopt the following guidelines:

- Keep messages short; less than 25 lines per message is recommended.
- Keep paragraphs to a few sentences each.
- Keep lines to less than 70 characters.

Another way to reduce the length of e-mails is to use 'two-cent' words in preference to 'two-dollar' words, as described earlier in this section.

## Misspellings

Misspellings or typos may or may not be an issue for your receiver. It all depends on the context of the message. For example, a message beginning with:

Confriming our meeting for 10:00 am. on Wednesday

would look unprofessional in a business e-mail to an important client

However, most people in business routinely accept a few minor misspellings in a message, as they realise that you are just as busy as they are.

In general, the more informal the context of the message is, the more that people will tend to tolerate misspellings.

## E-Mail Names

It is worth taking a few minutes to think through the e-mail name you will use (that is, if the system you use gives you a choice). The name immediately conveys a lot about the context in which you expect to deal, and will certainly give the receiver a few clues about the kind of person you are or your status in the organisation. For example:

Barbara.J.Thompson@roadcontractors.com.au

would indicate that the person is most likely to be dealing in a business context.

Chris.Williams@hotmail.com

is the kind of name a person would use when known to most of his or her receivers (i.e. the context makes the difference between Christopher, Christine or Christiana immaterial).

RadSkater@bigpond.com

— is for the person who wants to be known to most of his or her receivers as a teenager (or is a teenager).



## Formality and Informality

By its nature, e-mail is a more conversational than other forms of written communication, such as letters or memos. The formal style of writing therefore tends to get different results to the informal. It is worth remembering that:

- the best guide to the degree of informality you use is the local custom of your receivers (e.g. do they accept informal use of names as the norm?)
- an informal tone encourages a response (e.g. if you are trying to encourage input to a proposal, informal may be appropriate; if you don't want to be flooded with responses, use a slightly more formal tone).

## Smileys

There are now whole dictionaries devoted to the meaning of smileys, or facial expressions formed by using standard keyboard characters. Smileys commonly used in e-mails include:

:-) happy

:-( sad

:-o astonished

>:-< angry

;-) wink

The general rule with smileys is: if it's appropriate in the context, use them.

## Acronyms and Jargon

Commonly used acronyms include:

BTW by the way

FYI for your information

IMHO in my humble/honest opinion

LOL laughing out loud

ROTFL (I am) rolling on the floor laughing (at what you just said)

TIA thanks in advance {also written advTHANKSance}

NRN no response needed

E-mail has a jargon all its own. The only way to learn the jargon is to use the medium and get to know the terms by practical example. A few examples follow.

<b>Spam</b>	Unsolicited e-mail sent to many people simultaneously; usually commercial, but may be damaging (e.g. viruses) or annoying (e.g. chain letters).
<b>Bounce</b>	A message that was returned to the sender, either because the mail address was incorrect, or there was a configuration problem at the receiver's end.
<b>Mailbot</b>	A piece of software that automatically replies to e-mail.

As with smileys, acronyms and jargon may be used if appropriate in the context.

In addition, people often transmit smileys and acronyms as SMS messages on mobile phones.

### *Domain Names*

The domain name is the part that comes after the @ sign in the e-mail address, such as:

aol.com

abc.net.au

The word at the left is the name of the computer that actually handles the e-mail. For example, “aol” is Australia On-Line” and ‘abc’ is Australian Broadcasting Commission.

It is very important to get the domain name right when sending e-mails. For example, the following e-mails will most likely reach two different people in different departments of the same organisation:

pat@uno.bogusname.com

pat@dos.bogusname.com

The following are examples of commonly used parts of domain names:

.com Commercial business, company (US and Australia)

.co Commercial business, company (NZ and United Kingdom)

.net Network provider, internet service provider

.edu Educational institution (university, TAFE or school)

.org Not-for-profit organisation

.gov Government department (US and Australia)

.govt Government department (NZ and United Kingdom)

## Reports

A business report is a means of recording factual information, opinions and recommendations in a standard format so that the data can be analysed, discussed, distributed, stored, and acted upon. A standard format is used so that the data can be recorded and presented in a logical and consistent manner. The purpose of a business report is to achieve some purpose or goal and so it is important that the data is presented in a way that is readily accessible and understandable.



Many companies have adopted a standard format or style of report and if you are required to submit a report, you should firstly find out what is expected and follow the example of some typical reports that are similar in nature to the report that you are required to submit.

Case Study no. 4 gives an example of a standard format.

The following standard report styles are described in detail to give you a basic understanding of the requirements of a business report and may be used as a guide where a specific company format is not available.

There are many different ways of setting out a report depending on factors such as:

- Length of the report
- Type of report
- Type of information
- Type of delivery

## Length of the Report

A short report may use a simple and efficient format to record data whereas a long report might use a much more complex layout with a numbering system to detail comprehensive information. Both types of report will follow a similar set of steps to present a logical development of the report.

A basic, short report may use the following simple format, including the sections.

- Title page
- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

Longer, more comprehensive reports may include additional sections such as a table of contents, synopsis, bibliography and appendix.

## Type of Report

Three typical types of reports are:

- Investigative report
- Progress report
- Periodic report

### *Investigative Report*

This type of report is most commonly used to investigate the need for some action. The action may be required, for instance, to fix a problem, initiate changes to improve efficiency or to expand business activities. For example, an investigative report may be written to analyse the reasons for frequent machinery breakdowns and make recommendations to improve the situation.

### *Progress Report*

A progress report may be prepared on request or on a regular basis to communicate progress on work being done to people within, or external to, the company. For example, a report may be prepared regularly on a fortnightly basis to inform senior management and clients of progress being made on a project. The report may include details of current job status and may record details of problems, action taken, and recommendations for future action.

### *Periodic Report*

Periodic reports are prepared to provide information on some aspect of a business's activities to various levels of the business. For example, a monthly report on costs and expenditure may be prepared on a regular basis and circulated to senior management and supervisors so that they can manage their financial responsibilities better. Information in this type of report is often displayed in graph or chart format so that it can be compared to information from the previous period or budget targets.

## Type of Information

Some reports contain a lot of complex technical or factual information while others may be used to record opinions and predictions. Many reports use facts and analysis to support a case leading to recommendations for action.

Reports containing a lot of pictorial information in the form of graphs, pictures or even videos or sound recordings may be presented in a different format to reports that mainly use written words.

## Type of Delivery

Reports will differ in the way that they are presented and delivered. Some reports may be delivered orally, for example, at a meeting or conference and others in written format. Most written reports are copied and distributed throughout the organisation. Reports may also be presented using technology such as PowerPoint presentations and using sound or video recordings.

## Filling in Forms

Supervisors will often be expected to fill in forms and may on occasion be required to design forms to gather information. These types of documents are called pro forma sheets and some examples of forms that may need to be completed at work are:

- Time sheet
- Gate pass
- Leave application
- Stationery request
- Work order.

When filling in forms such as these it is important that the information is complete and accurate and if it is handwritten, that it is legible. As with any form of communication in the workplace, errors can lead to delays, frustration and extra cost and so it is worth getting it right first time.

Supervisors may sometimes need to create forms to gather and record information. In this case, forms should be designed so that they satisfy the following criteria:

- The information gathered should be only what is required – extra information wastes time and effort.
- Form layout should be designed carefully so that adequate room is left for users to fill in the required information.
- Forms should be designed in a logical order — make them user-friendly and easy to read.

---

### **Remember!**

*When designing a new form, think about forms you have used in the past and what made them easy or hard to use. Wherever possible, set up forms so that they are as easy to use as possible.*

---

Types of forms that road construction supervisors may be called on to complete include:

- time sheets
- foreman's daily report
- incident notification
- hazard report.



While this information has an immediate value as a record of work performed and time spent, it may also become important again at a future date. Case Study 2 provides an example.

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**Important!**

*The information in a site diary should match inspector's reports and contractor's reports as closely as possible. Differing content of reports can cause problems at a later date, especially if they are used as evidence in court.*

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## Site Diary

The foreman's daily report shown above is one example of the type of form companies use to record daily events on site. The site diary is an important record that has legal implications. On most construction sites, both parties to a contract keep to assist them in meeting contract obligations and in recording significant events that occur on the worksite.

For instance, supervisors should record details of accidents or serious incidents, confrontations with contractors or members of the public, etc. These records or entries may be used in court or in any subsequent investigations into the event that has occurred.

In using a diary or log book to record details, there are a number of important considerations to remember. Entries should be:

- legible (able to be read easily)
- accurate (check that the information is correct)
- detailed (time, date, place, witnesses etc.)
- specific and relevant (to-the-point and meaningful)
- factual (avoid guesses, opinions etc.)
- timely (write entries promptly – not weeks later)
- not emotional (emotional entries may lack credibility).

Case Study No. 4 shows two daily reports produced by the same foreman at different times. One report includes only a few words under 'Remarks'. The other includes detailed comments about conditions on site and is therefore much more useful to the company's managers.

Site diaries are discussed in more detail in Topic 4 in this series, entitled Contract Administration.

# Incident Notification (Form 3)

Whenever an incident that is notifiable in terms of the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995, an incident report must be completed. These reports are completed:

- by the principal contractor on a construction workplace
- whenever a serious bodily injury, work-caused illness or dangerous event occurs in a workplace
- within 24 hours of the principal contractor's becoming aware of the incident.

The Workplace Health and Safety website [www.whs.qld.gov.au](http://www.whs.qld.gov.au) gives instructions for completing the form and retaining copies, and lists the offices to which the completed form must be sent.

**FORM 3**  
I2-07-03

Queensland Government  
Department of Industrial Relations  
AR 12 203 948 176

ORIGINAL

**INCIDENT NOTIFICATION FORM**

READ NOTES/DIRECTIONS PRIOR TO COMPLETION OF THIS FORM - PLEASE PRINT

**Type of incident**  
 work injury  serious bodily injury  work caused illness  dangerous event  dangerous electrical event  
 Notify Department of Industrial Relations  Yes  No  serious electrical incident  
 Was injury/illness fatal?  Yes  No If an electrical incident, has the area been made safe?  Yes  No

**Details of injured person**  
 Given names: \_\_\_\_\_ Surname: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Residential Address: \_\_\_\_\_ D.O.B.: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_  Male  Female

**Basis of employment**  
 Full time  Part time   
 Casual  Volunteer   
 Member of public  Other   
 Self-employed  Other

**Type of employment**  
 Administration  Tradesperson  Apprentice/trainee   
 Technical  Professional  Student   
 Other

**Nature of work injury or work caused illness**, eg fracture, sprain & strain, electrical shock, burns, etc. \_\_\_\_\_

**Bodily location of injury or work caused illness** \_\_\_\_\_

**Medical treatment**  nil  first aid  doctor only  hospital admitted to: \_\_\_\_\_ (if overnight)

**Mechanism of injury/disease**  
 Falls, trips and slips  Sound and pressure  Biological factors   
 Lifting objects with part of body  Body stressing  Mental stress   
 Heat radiation and electricity  Chemicals and other substance  Other and unspecified mechanisms of injury

**Agency of injury/disease**  
 Machinery and (moving) feed parts  Mobile plant and transport  Animal, human and biological agencies   
 Powered equipment, tools and appliances  Non-powered handtools, appliances and equipment  Environmental agencies   
 Chemicals and chemical products  Materials and substances  Other and unspecified agencies

**Details of how incident occurred**  
 Day \_\_\_\_\_ Month \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_ Time of incident: \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm  
 Description of incident (Attach report) \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of employer/self-employed person/principal contractor** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address of employer/self-employed person/principal contractor** \_\_\_\_\_ **Location address of workplace where incident occurred** \_\_\_\_\_

Name of W.H.S.O. and phone no. (if any) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

**Employer/Self-Employed Person/Principal Contractor Signature**  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_\_ Month \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

**OFFICE USE ONLY**  
 District Reference No. \_\_\_\_\_ Action \_\_\_\_\_  
 Plant No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: Day \_\_\_\_\_ Month \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_  
 Workplace/Construction Workplace No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Licence No. \_\_\_\_\_

PRIVACY STATEMENT: The Department of Industrial Relations respects your privacy and is committed to protecting personal information. The information provided on this form is for the purpose of advising Workplace Health and Safety Queensland under the Electrical Safety Act of a reportable incident and will be managed within the requirements of information protection legislation. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WH&S) and Electrical Safety Queensland (ESQ) for reasons of health and safety the Department may be required to disclose the personal information contained in this form to other government agencies or entities, or as may be required by law. Further information on our privacy policy is available on our website www.dil.qld.gov.au.

Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995

WORKPLACE RECORD

COMPLETE FOR REPORT TO WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY (Other Versions None)

# Hazard Report (Form 4)

A hazard report may be used to advise an employer or workplace health and safety officer of any hazardous condition, work practice or related issue at work. The aim of the report is to promote the resolution of workplace hazards by discussion between employers, workplace health and safety representatives and workers.

Instructions for completing the form and retaining copies are available from the Workplace Health and Safety website.

**FORM 4**  
V5.6-03

Queensland Government  
Department of Industrial Relations  
AR 12 203 948 176

ORIGINAL

**HAZARD REPORT FORM**

**1) Brief description of Hazard/Health and Safety Issue**  
 Include details, if any, of immediate action taken to ensure the safety of persons who may be affected.

**2) Where is the Hazard Located in the Workplace?**

**3) Time/Date Hazard Identified**  
 Time: \_\_\_\_\_ am \_\_\_\_\_ pm / /

**4) Recommended action to fix an Issue**  
 Recommended completion date: / /

**5) PLEASE NOTE: This report does not imply that all conditions and work practices are acceptable**  
 Workplace Health & Safety Representative (WH&SR) \_\_\_\_\_ Received by the employer or Health and Safety Officer: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**6) How did the Employer Address the Hazard/Issue?**

Do You Consider the Issue Resolved?  
 Yes  No Completed on: / /  
 WH&SR Signature: / /

**TO BE COMPLETED IF THE REPRESENTATIVE INTENDS TO NOTIFY THE INSPECTOR**

**7) Details of Employer** **8) Details of Principal Contractor**  
Only if employed on construction work  
 Employer/Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Principal Contractor Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address where you are normally employed: \_\_\_\_\_ Employer Phone Number: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995

## Written Complaints and Issues

One of the main responsibilities of a supervisor is to act as a troubleshooter and deal with complaints and issues as they arise on a day-to-day basis. Minor complaints and issues are usually dealt with in a personal manner either face-to-face or sometimes over the telephone. When a complaint or issue is received in written form, then usually, the response should also be made in written form. Some companies have specific forms or standard policies and procedures for dealing with complaints, such as Requests for Information or RFIs. It is important that you are familiar with, and follow, these requirements.

The following points should be considered when dealing with complaints or issues that are in written form:

- Don't avoid the issue or complaint, treat it seriously and follow it through
- If it will take some time to investigate or resolve the issue, then advise the person who has raised the matter so that they are not left wondering what is happening
- Be aware of specific regulations of the local council or other bodies such as the Environmental Protection Agency when handling complaints regarding, for instance, noise or dust pollution
- Handle complaints and issues tactfully in situations where the public and the media may be involved, so that the reputation of the company is protected

## Request for Information (RFI)

Supervisors in the construction industry are often called on to fulfill a request for information (RFI). Such requests often originate from the company's main office, and may be related to a legal dispute, accounting department enquiry or a public complaint. An example of an RFI and the site supervisor's response to it is given in Case Study 3 at the end of this Topic.

The foreman's daily report, as described later in this section, is frequently used as the source document for answering RFIs.

The main points about RFIs are that they:

- (usually) require a prompt response
- are best answered by referring to job records, possibly including those from completed works
- depend on people maintaining high standards of record keeping in site offices.

## Written Warnings

There may be times when a supervisor is required to issue a written warning to an employee, contractor or other person who is working within his/her area of responsibility. Warnings may be issued for a number of reasons, for example:

- A contractor behaving in an unsafe manner e.g. driving too fast in a work area
- An employee habitually late for work

Some companies have standard forms or standard procedures for written warnings and you should check with your manager to make sure that you are complying with company policies and procedures when you issue a warning. These warnings may be used as evidence, for example, in a situation where an employee is suing the company for unfair dismissal, so it is important that all written warnings are done properly and according to correct procedures. The following points should be kept in mind when completing a written warning:

- Make sure that the warning is clearly explained and accurate — record times, dates, conditions and events when necessary
- Keep it brief and to-the-point — there is no need for unnecessary information
- The warning should be free of emotion — keep it factual, avoid exaggeration, blame or personal criticism
- Explain the procedure, your expectations and the likely consequences of non-cooperation to the person receiving the warning so that he/she can modify his/her behaviour accordingly
- Set a follow-up date for review if necessary
- Save a copy of the written warning, making sure that it is stored in a secure manner and that confidentiality is maintained
- Follow company policies and procedures — send copies to your manager, the union etc., as required

Any other information that is relevant to the warning should be noted in your diary or otherwise recorded and saved. This might include, for example, details of conversations that you had with witnesses to an incident.

## Managing Written Communications

Written communications are part of the assets of a company as they represent a collection of information, data and knowledge. These documents should be managed carefully to ensure that they are kept safe and available for use or referral when required. There are legal requirements to retain documents in some cases. This might occur, for instance, where the documents may refer to a workplace accident or else they may contain financial data that relates to taxation claims. It is important that this type of documentation is stored in a secure manner and that confidentiality of sensitive information is maintained.

## Storing Information

A well-organised filing system is an essential on construction sites, to enable efficient handling, storage and retrieval of the many forms, letters, memos, invoices, receipts, and other paper records that inevitably accumulate. If you follow good housekeeping practices, you will be able to retrieve information quickly and easily and avoid frustrating searches for lost or misplaced documents.



Emails can be saved on a computer and these documents and other important information such as letters or personnel files that are stored on the computer should be saved to the hard disk regularly. Important data and files should also be saved to a back up file and a copy kept in an external location as a safety precaution against loss due to fire, theft, flood etc.

## Confidentiality

Much of the information that a supervisor collects will be confidential and should be stored carefully so that it cannot fall into the wrong hands. Confidential information could include personal details about employees and also details of contract bids, recommendations or legal communications. Most companies have strict systems in place to maintain confidentiality of data including the use of restricted access to computers and files, use of passwords, pin numbers and other security measures to prevent unauthorised access.

## Security

Unauthorised access to a company's documents and data must also be prevented by the use of good security measures. File cabinets and offices should be kept securely locked to prevent the theft or copying of information and also theft or damage of computers and other equipment.

## Written Progress Reports

Supervisors may be required to submit written progress reports on a regular basis to provide information to managers and clients so that they can get an accurate picture of the current status of work. The type of report that is needed will depend on the company's standard procedures or the client's specific requirements. Reports should be accurate and concise and should use good written communication skills, such as, attention to spelling and correct punctuation. Regardless of the format of the report, it will contain some or all of the following elements:

- Report on work progress
- Report on costs
- Report on staff
- Report on general conditions

## Report on Work Progress

An important part of the progress report is the schedule of activities that gives a written and/or visual comparison between estimated and actual progress on the project. This information may be presented in the form of a chart or diagram such as a:

- Bar chart
- Line chart
- Critical path network

This information is vital for managers and clients to get a good overview of how the project is progressing and whether there are any areas of concern. In addition, the schedule can highlight areas where cost savings can be made, plant utilisation can be improved or where extra resources (e.g. labour or materials) may be required to keep the project on target.

The construction schedule may, for example, record activities such as stripping, earthworks, drainage or bitumen surfacing and show the actual progress compared to planned progress at that date. The comparison may also be shown as a percentage e.g. excavation is 50% complete.

## Report on Costs

A progress report on costs is also important to managers and clients so that they can keep close control of expenditure. These costs may be actual costs or when details are not available, estimates are made. Details of costs could include:

- Plant
- Labour
- Sub contractor payments
- Materials

As well as recording direct costs, the progress report might also include indirect costs (e.g. supervision and administration) and overhead costs such as Head Office fees and charges.

The process of estimating and recording costs is covered in more detail in Topic 3 in this training series, Estimating and Cost Control.

## Report on Staff

The progress report may record staff information such as:

- Absenteeism
- Sick leave
- Holidays
- Overtime

The report might also provide a breakdown and summary of work hours. It could also include details of toolbox or team meetings as well as any workplace incidents requiring counselling.

## Report on General Conditions

The progress report may contain general information that is relevant to the job such as weather conditions or local activities that may have caused delays or had an impact on the progress of the work. This part of the report may also include details on any contact with the public, meetings with councils, clients, unions or sub contractors. The report should contain a section on safety with a summary of accidents, incidents or injuries with full details of any serious events.

In some cases, progress reports can contain other information about areas of activity that may be of special interest, for example, environmental or heritage concerns.

## Section 3 – Assessment Activities

For information on how these assessment activities may be used as part of the learning process, see the section on ‘Assessment’ in the ‘Topic Descriptor’ section at the front of this topic.

### Theory Questions

The following questions allow you to assess your progress in understanding the material presented in Section 3. The questions may be of any of the following types:

- multiple choice (identify correct answer or answers)
- multiple choice (identify incorrect answer or answers)
- fill in the gaps in a sentence or statement
- identify a sentence or statement as TRUE or FALSE
- write a few sentences or a short paragraph.

Answers to the question are shown in the separate ‘Answer’ section.

#### Question 1

Correct the punctuation in the following sentence:

The company managers made a serious attempt to remedy this state of affairs, they were keen to demonstrate how importantly they regard workplace safety.

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#### Question 2

Re-write the following sentence in a simpler form.

In view of the fact that atmospheric conditions have shown some improvement, we will utilise this window of opportunity to re-commence operations in the not too distant future.

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### Question 3

Re-write the following sentence without Americanisms.

A meeting of on-site labor on November 3, 2004 decided to organize a strike for the following Friday, depending on the management's response to their demands.

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### Question 4

Why does a subject line in an e-mail have a different function to one in a business letter?

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### Question 5

Which of the following sets of abbreviations, etc would be more likely to indicate that an e-mail message is being sent in a business context?

URGENT REQ: FYI

LOL CUL8R ROTFL

IMHO TIA NRN

BTW :-D psssst! <g>

### Question 6

If you receive e-mails from the following senders, which is (or are) more likely to be dealing with you in a business context? (Note: all of the following are fictitious).

safety@torres.qld.gov.au

doomslayer4@hotmail.com

treesolutions@optusnet.com.au

Alan.Nicholson@usq.edu.au

### Question 7

A supervisor sometimes has to deal with written complaints. Indicate whether you think that the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

Minor complaints can often be dealt with in a personal manner, either face-to-face or over the phone ( )

Take some time to respond to a written complaint as this will give the person who is complaining, time to cool down and reconsider ( )

Handle complaints tactfully in situations where the public and the media are involved ( )

### Question 8

List four types of information that would normally be recorded on a Foreman's Daily Report (or its equivalent in your company).

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### Question 9

Which of the following items of information would normally be recorded on a WH&S Incident Notification?

Date and time that the incident occurred

Accurate description of the incident /accident

Nature of the injury or work-caused illness

Conditions at the time, if relevant (e.g. raining, fine weather, windy etc.)

Names of witnesses (if any)

Action taken at the time

### Question 10

Why is a well-organised filing system of value in the handling of RFIs?

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## Practical Exercises

### *Practical Exercise 1*

After consulting your site supervisor, make a list of the main types of documents stored in the site filing system. How many different types of documents can you identify? What proportion of record-keeping do you estimate to be directly related to the construction contract?

### *Practical Exercise 2*

Print out a copy of the Incident Notification form from the WH&S website and complete it for the incident described in Case Study No. 2 at the end of this Topic. (If the training is undertaken in a group setting, discuss the details of the incident with other learners in your group).

### *Practical Exercise 3*

Keep a diary/daily log of on-site events for at least one week. What types of information are relevant or irrelevant to keep in a diary?

### *Practical Exercise 4*

Complete an accident notification or a hazard report form. (Talk to your supervisor about past accidents or hazards if there have been none on site recently).