
UNIT 3 TARGET GROUPS WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- appreciate and underscore that success to written communication is determined only when it meets the requirements of the targeted reader;
 - recognise different varieties of target groups with their distinct requirements of written communication;
 - identify different groups of readers with reference to the writing situations;
 - do reader analysis to slant technical communication towards their requirements; and
 - adopt this approach in professional writing and also in library and information services,
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3.1 INTRODUCTION

We have learnt in Units 1 and 2 of this Block that the underlying principle that governs written communication is that it should invariably be oriented towards the requirements of the targeted reader. In this Unit, we would expand our study of targeted readers of written communication, their expectations, demands and needs. In other words, we shall try to learn what exactly the readers look for, from a written communication to meet any of their needs.

Every written communication has its own purpose as conceived by the author; but his purpose is not the determining factor that makes the written communication worthwhile. On the other hand, it is the receiver who should feel satisfied with the written material he has got. To understand this, the technique of reader analysis is a useful exercise for providing the necessary guidance to an author. Although this cannot be a method of ensuring success to an author in every writing-situation, it should provide him sufficient guidance in the entire process of writing. The contents, structural outline for fleshing the contents, presentation of the contents in a simple, elegant and lucid language and style, and providing all other aids, are important to make the target users satisfied.



Not only are the groups of readers too large and varied, but also their specific requirements and purpose vary considerably. We shall pay full attention, in this Unit, to various categories of target groups and their expectations, needs and demands that should provide useful guidance in the process of writing on technical subjects.

3.2 TARGET GROUPS

We have learnt that any communication process, be it oral or written, terminates with the message reaching the receiver. The receiver may be an individual or a group of persons functioning in different situations. These receivers are generally referred to as the audience or more specifically readers. The term 'readers' refers to individuals, or a group of individuals who have potential for being exposed to and using a written information product or service.

The views of reader adopted here do not presume that the user group must be of a specific size or particularly diverse, that all its members be exposed to the same information at the same time, or that members of the group must be unknown to the information producer. More basic is the view that the information product or service offered must be deliberately produced and distributed to meet the requirements of different groups.

The essence of this approach is that information should be aimed at a specific target group. There could be, however, many categories of readers based upon characteristics chosen for the purpose for which the written communication is attempted.

Self Check Exercise

1) Explain reasons for slanting technical writing to readers requirement.

Note:

- i) Write your answer in the space given below.
- ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

3.2.1 Types of Readers

Readers can be classified by a) age and sex; b) individuals and groups; c) level of knowledge in a subject; d) level of technical proficiency; e) institutions and organisations and similar other characteristics. The requirements of these groups can be matched against writing situations; and the appropriate documents can be produced. It is, however, important to note that for classification of anything, there is no single characteristic or a single set of characteristics for division that could meet every purpose. The resulting groups are also not always mutually exclusive. The choice of characteristics invariably has to depend upon the purpose of division.

Writing situations and the target groups are given below. These are only illustrative, not exhaustive.



Sl. No	Writing Situation	Target Group
i)	Persuasive writing (proposals, promotional materials, etc.)	Directors of an institutions; Top managers of companies; Special committees; Consumers of products and services; and the like.
ii)	Instructional writing (Teaching and learning materials, guides, manuals, etc.)	Students and teachers; Professional and technical personnel; users of different categories.
iii)	Writings aiding decision making processes (feasibility reports, committee and commission reports, etc.) Professional writings (Scientists, specialist groups of technocrats, technicians, managers, etc.)	Heads of institutions; Departments of govts. Business and industrial undertakings; and the like. Peers in science and technology; Various levels of subject/professional expertise; Generalists but non-professionals; Laypersons.

Table 1 : Writing Situation and Target Group

While the members of the above reader groups are consumers of information, technical communication underscores the active and dynamic quality of consumers. This leads us to the discussion of audience analysis.

Self Check Exercise

2) Identify a few categories of reader and relate them to the type of writing situations.

Note:

- i) Write your answer in the space given below.
- ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

3.2.2 Characteristics of Readers

The goal of technical writing is to communicate information that is needed by a user group. The writer must be clear that the information conveyed is not to impress a user with his/her prowess for writing. Neither the information is for pleasure or for entertainment. It is also to be understood, particularly by beginners in technical writing, that readers who use the document come from different levels of subject background or technical proficiency. In other words, the entire piece of writing must be slanted to the expectations and abilities of use of the target group.

Just as a writer is induced by some motivation to write, readers also have some reasons to use a written document. Various factors such as goals, needs, attitudes and



values, capability and competence, utility, communication style, context, experience and habit of audience group determine the nature of technical writing.

The goals of a user group may be to achieve competence in an area such as computer skill to improve the person's chances of improving career opportunities. Research scientists may be interested in keeping themselves abreast of current developments in their field of research. A business person may be keen to enlarge the scope of his business by studying available market reports on the nature of consumers in a locality.

Most often needs of users necessitate them to seek information. These needs may be met by a manual or a reference guide.

Attitudes - preferences and predispositions about particular topics, people and situations - also play a critical role in information consumption. It is also observed that most persons will look for information and interpretations that support their perceptions before they will consider nonsupportive information.

Values are basic principles that often determine users' choice and preferences in the selection of information. As with attitudes, values also can substantially influence users in their choice selection, interpretation and retention.

The interrelationship of attitudes, values, and information consumption is a complex one. On occasions, information inconsistent with our attitudes can lead us to give it more attentive than that consistent with our attitudes. We spend more time to reflect on information that troubles us than on messages that are consistent with our perspective; our tendency, yet often is to take the latter for granted.

Competence and capability of users on a particular subject or topic and the facility with which they understand the technical jargons and the language style and tone, have obvious impact on the kinds of information sought.

Generally speaking users will attend to and make efforts to understand and remember information that they are intending to use. To an individual who is interested in buying television set, informative articles on the qualities of TV sets, advertisements and trade literature, etc. would be much more relevant, and of immediate use than a technical article on TV sets.

The context in which a person functions, determines his needs and utility for that information. If the information is not available at the time required to meet a particular need in a given context, that information may not have any use for a user later.

Users of information, also develop habits or inclinations as a result of their experience in the reception or response to different kinds of information. Preferences for certain author journals, institutional publications are some of the habits that users cultivate.

The initial exercise in the process of technical writing, therefore, has to study the audience to whom the writing is meant for. This exercise is not a mere academic ritual. It is the first and probably the most important step in the process of technical writing.

Self Check Exercise

3) Give a few characteristics of audiences that tend to influence the technical writing process.

Note:

- i) Write your answer in the space given below.
- ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of this Unit.



3.3 READER ANALYSIS

Writing about reader and adaptation, Ram D. Taneja (1990), accentuates the need for studying the reader for whom the writing is intended. He writes, "the first great principle of writing is economy of mental effort on the part of the reader. When a writer assumes the reader's knowledge of the subject or interest in the subject mirrors the writer's own, it usually results in extra effort on the part of the reader. A specialist, writing for other specialists in the same field often feels justified in making the reader work to understand the text, under the assumption that, since the reader mirrors the author's knowledge and interest concerning the subject, they are willing to put as much work into reading the text as the author puts into writing it. Unfortunately, that is often a mistaken assumption. A skillful writer will take the time and trouble to write for a real audience, making a realistic appraisal of their knowledge, their interest and their willingness to expend effort in their reading. *A skillful writer remembers the reader.*"

The reader for a good part of technical writing is diversified, from the persons trained in related technical specialities to those with little or no technical background. In such instances, it is the writer's responsibility to bridge the gap wherever necessary. That gap can be considerable, depending upon the nature of the technical document whether it is for a laymen, a technician, a semiskilled operator, or an expert engineer. For instance, the reader for a user guide to a software package in graphics for personal computer might include:

- management
- engineers
- students
- professors
- secretarial staff
- programmers
- professional staff
- marketing staff

"In every field the number of situations requiring one to write for a reader which is not composed of specialists in that field is on the increase. Architects write for bank officers, engineers write for departmental estimate committees, chemists write for management, and everyone writes for government bureaucrats" (Ram D. Taneja, 1990).

Knowing the readers' depth of subject background and interest has therefore, become essential in technical writing. Systematic studies to understand a reader is generally referred to as "reader analysis". Some writers prefer to use the expression "reader adaptation" for reader analysis.

Self Check Exercise

4) Explain the need for reader analysis for being successful in technical writing.

Note:

- i) Write your answer in the space given below.
- ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of this Unit.



3.3.1 Guidelines for Reader Analysis

As an understanding of the reader is so fundamental to successful technical writing, many writers prefer to prepare 'Reader Profiles' before beginning any complicated assignment. Some of the facts, among others, that they try to obtain of readers include their

- general education
- subject specialisation,
- position in organisation
- responsibilities in, organisations,
- need for information
- possible use of information obtained, and
- preferences in reading
- expectations in a technical document

Such reader profiles may help categorising readers into primary, secondary and fringe group. The writer *adjusts* the organisation, emphasis and language of the writing according to the requirements of readers. If this preliminary step is overlooked, the efforts in preparing a technical document would become a waste, particularly if the document is unrelated to the reader's level of understanding.

It is suggested by experienced technical writers that writers develop a profile of their reader and group them in the following manner:

- High-tech readers
- Low-tech readers
- Lay readers
- Mixed readers
- Multiple readers

Self Check Exercise

5) State some of the facts that should go into a reader profile.

Note:

- i) Write your answer in the space given below.
- ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

3.2.2 Checklist for Reader Analysis

We have noted that different readers pose different problems for a writer in organising and presenting his/her writing. A checklist is given below to give a general guidance to aid writers to prepare their reader profiles:



- Content: Depth or shallow; long or short; relevant or irrelevant;
- Concepts: Familiarity or unfamiliarity with concepts; laymen's definitions or standard technical definitions; lengthy or short explanations;
- Vocabulary: Popular or technical;
- Organisation: All or selected facets of a topic; Preferred or conventional sequence;
- Methods of Development : Necessity for (i) a historical perspective (ii) Comparison and contrast;
- Graphics : Necessity to support text; kinds of graphics; and
- Others.

Self Check Exercise

6) Mention a few headings that would be useful to prepare a checklist for reader's guidance.

Note:

- i) Write your answer in the space given below.
- ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

3.4 WRITING SITUATIONS AND TARGET GROUPS

In the foregoing sections, we have been discussing some general aspects of readers and the need for a writer to slant the writing to respond to specific requirements of target groups. In this section, we shall take a few instances of technical writing and examine the correlation required to match reader requirements. The five writing situations taken for illustration here are:

- Professional writing;
- Proposal writing;
- Instructional writing;
- Office memos; and
- Preparation materials for oral presentation.

3.4.1 Professional Writing

Professionals are not always one homogenous group for whom one kind of writing would meet all requirements. There is the peer group who are equals, have more or less the same or similar qualifications and professional experience. Practitioners, who are in operational positions and who have considerable field experience constitute another subgroup. A third group would perhaps be the learning groups who are freshers, needing field experience and looking for information that would enhance their pragmatic-knowledge and theoretical foundations.

Learned journals largely satisfy the first group viz. peers who would look for developments in the field and would like to *verify* and assess results, and critically evaluate the quality of research. Although there are certain conventions and practices in writing for this group, the main aspects are not to state that they are already well



known and established among the peers. The writing would have to be specifically dealing with wavefronts of knowledge and research conducted in these areas. The writer would await peer groups reactions and critical comments that would reckon the contribution and also establish the person's standing and reputation in the field.

The third group comprises learners (and not beginners) in the field, most of them being in positions of picking up valuable experience, working under seniors. They have the necessary academic background and would be able to understand technical contributions. They may have abilities for critical examination. Writers for this group should come down to these groups levels of exposition required of a subject, so that their purpose to widen their knowledge is served.

3.4.2 Proposal Writing

While there are a variety of proposals, the main purpose of a proposal is to convince the reader to get the proposal approved along with financial and other supports sanctioned for the projects and programme proposed.

Whether a proposal is solicited or unsolicited, usually these are examined by the top person in the organisation who provides formal approval and sanctions. This person may be supported by technical experts in the organisation who may submit their critical assessment on different aspects to him. Sometimes the proposal may be examined by a technical committee whose collective view is taken for decision making by the top person. So there are a number of persons who would be involved in reading proposals. Hence the writer has to be careful to make the proposal absolutely clear from every point of view.

As we have noted in Unit 2 of this Block, the elements of a proposal are a) letter of transmittal; b) title; c) executive summary; d) table of contents; e) introduction; f) methodology; g) facilities required; h) personnel; i) duration; j) cost; and k) summary.

Every one of these elements is important since every element has a particular function. The persons who examine the proposal would look to the proposal from i) methodology point of view that reflects a certain degree of competence; ii) economics of the proposal including facilities requested and the budgetary positions, etc.; and iii) personnel that may be involved. So each of these groups may examine a particular section of the proposal and hence the writer has to give attention to every one of these elements.

3.4.3 Instructional Writing

Audience to this group would also comprise many groups. Among others, these groups may include learners, technicians working at operational levels, persons who guide, and those that assess the quality of instructional materials.

For those who are attending a course, teaching and learning materials that are prepared for the course, must help the process of learning and teaching. Care has to be taken by the writer to provide all the help required by way of lucid presentation with many illustrations, examples, and exercises to check the progress of learning, and a summary to recapitulate the main points.

Manuals for technicians at operational levels should help to apply the techniques with ease, in a step by step method, indicating pitfalls while operating a particular technique, diagrams, flowcharts and other visual aids, etc.

Persons who are supervisors should be able to use the manuals to instruct the trainees with suggestive examples, simulate various situations and attempt to develop self help while learning.

What is being stressed here is that user groups' requirements will have to be uppermost in the mind of the writer.



3.4.4 Official Memos

Memos are informal and formal messages communicated within an organisation. The contents are always internal organisational matters and addressed from the top to lower categories of personnel or among the employees from one to another section. Such internal memos should promote understanding and harmony and help the process of smooth functioning. Groups of persons are the general readers to this category of technical writing. Some of the attributes of a good memo include tone and language of writing, a positive approach to a particular problem, certain degree of persuasive writing if some aspects of a solution to a problem has to be generally accepted, and similar others.

3.4.5 Preparation Materials for Oral Presentation

We have already known that any good oral presentation has to be supported by written material, supplementing and complementing oral presentation. While flipcharts, OHP transparencies, slides and other aids are used during the presentation, certain types of written documents are also distributed during the talk to the readers. These documents are to reinforce the main arguments with reference to the topic of an oral presentation. These will be read by persons who have attended the talk and also by others who have an interest in the area but have not attended the talk. It should be a self-contained document, explaining every aspect of the topic. The idea is that persons who have the document should get interested in the oral presentation also and would make up their minds to attend similar talks when presented.

Self Check Exercise

7) Identify different categories of reader's for a feasibility report for library automation.

Note:

- i) Write your answer in the space given below.
- ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

3.5 SUMMARY

In this Unit, emphasis is laid on the study of readers for any type of technical writing. The main points of this Unit are:

- Any piece of technical writing has to be slanted towards the requirements of the readers;
- Readers are always a diversified group; they have to be classified, choosing characteristics relevant to the purpose. By way of illustration, there are four characteristics chosen for categorising readers, such as persuasive writing, instructional writing, writing for decision making and professional writing;
- Emphasising the need for reader analysis, some guidelines and-a checklist are given to prepare profiles of user groups in a given context; and
- Five writing situations are taken to match them against their target audience. Professional writing, proposals, instructional writing, office memos and presentation materials for oral presentation are the examples given.



3.6 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

- 1) Any information generated is meant to reach its seeker to serve a particular purpose. Its use and utility have to be the prime motive of the writer in his efforts in writing. Otherwise the efforts in technical writing are wasted. Hence a writer has always to adjust his writing to the needs and requirements of the reader.
- 2) Learners and instructors will always look for course materials that would serve their immediate needs.
Professionals will seek information to keep abreast of the developments in their fields.
Industrialists would look for market information dealing with consumers' preferences in planning a new product development.
Consumers in deciding to buy anything would seek aid in getting information about prices of products, quality, availability and such other information.
- 3) Various factors such as goals, needs, attitudes and values, . capability and competence, utility, communication style, context, experience and habit of audience groups, determine the nature of technical writing.
- 4) Readers do not constitute one single homogenous group. They are diversified with different needs, abilities to comprehend topics in different subjects, interests, context in which they need information, etc. Unless a writer understands all these through some kind of reader analysis, it is difficult to write to satisfy any group.
- 5) Some of the facts, among others, that writers try to obtain regarding of readers include their :
 - general education;
 - position in organisation;
 - need for information;
 - preferences in reading;
 - subject specialisation;
 - responsibilities in organisations;
 - possible use of information obtained; and
 - expectations in a technical document.
- 6) A checklist, given below gives a general guidance to aid writers to prepare their reader profiles:
 - Content : Depth or shallow; long or short; relevant or irrelevant;
 - Concepts : Familiarity or unfamiliarity with concepts; laymens's definitions or standard technical definitions; lengthy or short explanations;
 - Vocabulary : Popular or technical;
 - Organisation : All or selected facets of a topic; Preferred or conventional
 - Methods of Development : Necessity for (i) a historical perspective and (ii) Comparison contrast;
 - Graphics : Necessity to support text; kinds of graphics; and
 - Others.
- 7) The three groups of readers who would have a stake in a library automation programme are the users, the library staff and the parent organisation.
The feasibility study should spell the advantages of a library automation programme from the point of view of better library facilities for access to information collected in the library.
The fear of retrenchment, undermining the role of senior staff of the library who are not well-versed in computer applications, and serious change in the managerial structure which may not be sympathetic to them should be removed from their minds. The staff as a whole should accept the automation programme as an opportunity to build up a better image of the library. The management of the library moving from manual to automation should be handled with circumspection.

The parent organisation would expect a return from the investment they have made. There should be a definite visibility in terms of user services, smooth transformation of the modernisation programme.



3.7 KEY WORDS

Reader	:	Individual or a group of individuals who have potential for being exposed to and using an information product or service.
Reader Analysis	:	Analysing a target group with reference to a writing situation. A reader who is well-versed in any discipline or profession. Readers who use information.
High-Tech Reader	:	
Information Consumers	:	
Instructional writing	:	Writings that aid the process of learning, teaching, application operations, etc.
Lay Readers	:	Readers who have just a commonsense knowledge of a subject or profession.
Low-Technique Readers	:	Readers who have a smattering knowledge of a subject or profession.
Mixed Readers	:	Composite readers with various degree of specialisation in a discipline or profession but having a common interest in a particular subject or profession.
Multiple Readers	:	More or less similar to mixed readers.
Professional Writing	:	More or less similar to mixed readers.
Target Readers	:	Reader for whom a particular writing is meant.
User Group	:	Synonymous with reader.
User Profile	:	Data on any type of readers as a guide for technical writing.

3.8 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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