

Unit 4: Report Writing

AIM

The aim of this unit is to enable new inspectors to write accurate and informative reports following inspection visits to schools.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit inspectors will be able to:

- differentiate between types of inspection reports
- analyse observations and data
- identify key issues from analysis
- draft reports according to a set format
- report main findings to supervisors.

INSPECTORS' KEY SKILLS

The following skills are to be developed:

- identifying key issues
- analysing data and information
- using appropriate oral and written communication
- formulating recommendations.

CONTENT SUMMARY

- 4.1 Purpose of Report Writing
- 4.2 Types of Reports
- 4.3 Format and Structure of Reports
- 4.4 Information and Data Analysis
- 4.5 Oral Feedback
- 4.6 Writing a Report
- 4.7 Follow-up

4.1 PURPOSE OF REPORT WRITING

Report writing is one of the most important skills needed by inspectors. Inspectors need to develop skills in writing various types of reports.

Activity 4a

There are several reasons for writing reports. In groups, brainstorm the reasons for writing a report after a school visit. Report back giving a list of reasons.

Trainer's Notes

The reasons for writing inspection reports might include the following:

- (a) to give information to all stakeholders
 - advice to teachers about improvement of instruction
 - advice to school management about increasing effectiveness
 - information to the employer about performance of employees
 - information to the community about performance of schools (compare with other schools if necessary)
 - a record for the inspector
 - information to the Ministry of Education, for use in specific units such as:
 - standards control unit
 - curriculum development unit
 - in-service unit
 - personnel management unit
- (b) to improve school effectiveness by identifying strengths and key issues for action
- (c) to assist in policy formulation by providing feedback to the Ministry of Education.

4.2 TYPES OF REPORTS

The type of report depends on the purpose of the visit.

- quick memo
- institutional or full inspection report
- crisis report - "fire brigade"
- report on special aspects of a school
- report on teacher/headteacher
- teacher assessment report
- subject inspection report
- annual report
- disciplinary report

Activity 4b

In groups, discuss these case studies and decide on the type of report you would write for each.

Case Study 1

A Member of Parliament has taken the Minister of Education to task about poor conditions (low standards, low attendance, high drop-out rate and parental dissatisfaction) in a remote school and wants to know what the Minister intends to do about it. You are a member of the team that has been sent to inspect the school.

Case Study 2

There is a strike at a nearby school. You have been sent to investigate.

Case Study 3

The Permanent Secretary wants to know why the English results are poor in a certain region of the country.

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Case Study 4

You were passing through a boarding school where you discovered that the water supply had been cut off for three days. You decide to report on the situation.

Case Study 5

You have been informed that the local community is unhappy about the behaviour of the School Head. You are sent to investigate and write a report.

4.3 FORMAT AND STRUCTURE OF REPORTS

Inspectorates have set formats for different types of reports they require. For inspection purposes two common reports are:

1. Report on a teacher
2. Report on an institution

Activity 4c

Most reports on teachers include the following information:

- Information on the school
- Teacher's personal details
- Teacher's assignment/responsibility
- Planning and preparation
- Lesson delivery
- Teacher's qualities
- Recommendations

How do these compare with the format used in your country? Discuss this in your group. What else could be included?

Trainer's Note

You need sufficient copies of the format used in your country for:

1. Teacher report
2. Institutional report

Activity 4d

In groups, look back at Activity 4b, Case Study 1. This report should be a full institution report. What are the components (main features) that will make up this type of report? Give feedback to the whole group. Ask your trainer for a copy of the format used in your country to compare with your list.

Trainer's Note

These are only two examples of report formats. There are many more that inspectors will be required to use.

4.4 INFORMATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

In reporting on inspections, judgements should be based on evidence collected, such as:

Own notes

Data provided by the school noting strengths and weaknesses

Activity 4e

The chart below gives an analysis of 'A' level subject results of a school at the end of 1996. Carefully study the data and attend to the three tasks.

1. Draw a bar chart to represent subject performance.
2. What conclusions would you draw from the data provided about performance in individual subjects?
3. What would you recommend to the school?

ANALYSIS OF 'A' LEVEL RESULTS: 1996 - SCHOOL CANDIDATES ONLY

| SUBJECT | TOTAL NO OF CANDIDATES ENTERED | A | B | C | D | E | O | F | TOTAL NO. OF CANDIDATES WITH Es OR BETTER | % PASS RATE |
|------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| ENGLISH LIT. | 17 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 100 |
| SHONA | 18 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 16 | 89 |
| DIVINITY | 24 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 9 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 21 | 88 |
| HISTORY | 18 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 8 | 44.4 |
| GEOGRAPHY | 25 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 17 | 68 |
| ECONOMICS | | | | | | | | | | |
| PHYSICS | | | | | | | | | | |
| BIOLOGY | | | | | | | | | | |
| MATHS | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 33.3 |
| ADD. MATHS | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 37.5 |
| NDEBELE | | | | | | | | | | |
| MAN. OF BUSINESS | 8 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 8 | 100 |
| ACCOUNTING | | | | | | | | | | |

Total number of candidates entered = 40

Total number of candidates with 2 Es or better = 33

Percentage pass rate = 82.5%

A is highest possible grade

E is lowest possible grade

O is converted from 'A' level to 'O' level pass

F is fail

Trainer's Notes

There is insufficient evidence here to draw conclusions about the causes of poor results in some subjects. From the available data, we can recommend that the school does a review of its results and takes remedial action where performance is poor, while acknowledging good performance.

4.5 ORAL FEEDBACK

Some situations demand giving oral feedback. This could include:

- Feedback to the teacher (refer to Unit on Instructional Supervision)
- Debriefing the school management team immediately after inspection
- Reporting to your supervisor

The report should:

- articulate key issues emanating from the visit
- be brief and to the point
- emphasize issues under investigation

Activity 4f

- (a) In groups, discuss the importance of giving oral feedback immediately after the visit.
- (b) What problems would you anticipate in giving oral feedback and how would you solve them?

4.6 WRITING A REPORT

Activity 4g

Go out to a school, observe a lesson and write a report.

In writing a report, the following are important:

- Good communication skills
- Appropriate register (i.e. language appropriate to the reader)

(a) Avoid obsolete terminology that is common in reports e.g.

'It goes without saying ...'

'It has been brought to my attention ...'

'Needless to say ...'

(b) Make use of the passive to make reports more objective e.g.

'Several lessons were observed ...'

'A meeting was held ...'

'The number of participants invited was ...'

- (c) Avoid over-technical jargon or verbosity. Plain English is best in reports. Compare the following reports on an injury sustained by a worker in an office.

My employee's current indisposition is the unfortunate consequence of a work-related occurrence where failure of the said employee to extract two left digits from the aperture caused by the receding motion of the filing cabinet resulted in temporary incapacitation of the left hand used for typing.

Plain English: My secretary is off work because of fingers injured while closing a file drawer.

- (d) Avoid offensive expressions e.g.

'The teacher is ignorant of the syllabus ...'

'The head is lazy ...'

'The deputy head must be present at all assemblies ...'

- The appropriate layout and length.

- (a) Use concise, brief paragraphs in your report.

- (b) Use main headings and sub-headings to make the report easy to follow.

- (c) Make sure the stages of the report follow a logical sequence, especially in terms of headings.

- (d) Keep to a consistent format for the different types of report.

- (e) Keep reports short and to the point. Long reports do not get read and so have no impact: two to six pages is the ideal range for a report, depending on the type and purpose.

- (f) Care should be taken to avoid contradictions in the report.

- (g) Recommendations should arise from observations made in the report.

- (h) The report should highlight both strengths and weaknesses.

Trainer's Note

If a visit to a school is not possible, this activity can be done by using a pre-recorded video of a lesson or analysing and improving an existing inspection report.

4.7 FOLLOW-UP

It is the responsibility of inspectors to follow up issues after inspections. This may include follow-up action with the following:

- the school
- teachers
- in-service providers
- Ministry of Education departments
- other departments/institutions
- school board/committee

Activity 4h

1. Review the report written in Activity 4g and list follow-up activities needed after this inspection.
2. Discuss your findings/report with your group.

PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

Reflect on your own report writing and make a note of any action you feel you should take in your Personal Action Plan.

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