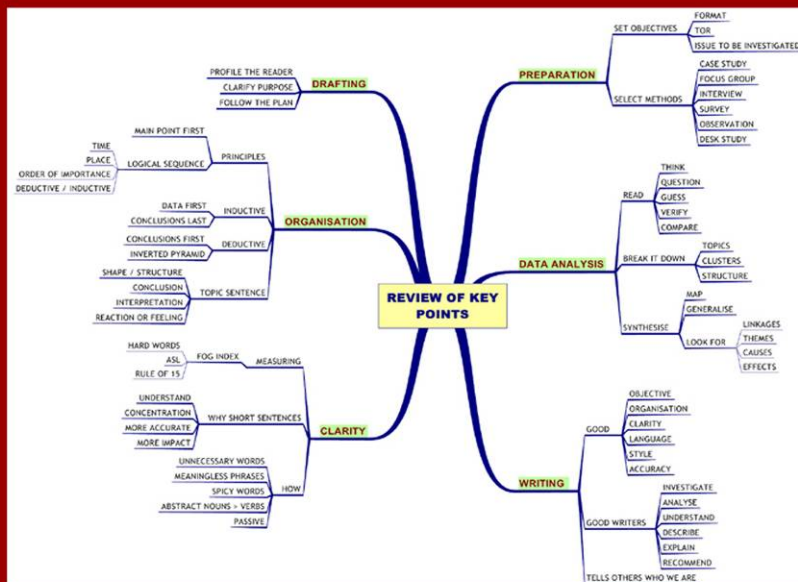


# The Reporting Skills and Professional Writing Handbook

a practical guide for development professionals

Revised August 2008

## Module Eight (Part D)



## Review of Key Points

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# Review of Key Points

## ***Preparation***

Always start with clear objectives about the purpose of the report. If it's a regular report, you may need to deconstruct the format to see how it fits together and how your report will lead to action / change. If you are a consultant, clarify the Terms of Reference with your client. If there is a specific issue to be investigated, make sure you know what it is. This is going to give you a starting point for all the following steps.

## ***Data Gathering***

Taking into account your objectives, select a range of data gathering methods that will give you the right amount and depth of information to answer your questions. Make sure the methods you select are acceptable to your donors, and that the target group can conform to your methods. Don't forget it's you who will have to analyse the results, so keep it simple. Choose your mix from case study, focus group, interview, survey, observation and desk study methods.

## ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis has three main steps. First, read through everything – think, ask questions, guess / make assumptions where you have to and verify what you can. Compare what you learn with what you expected to see. Next, break it down. Try to identify topics, themes and clusters of ideas / responses, see if you can bring a structure to your ideas. Finally, synthesise these ideas together. Be visual, use a method like Mind Mapping to help you draw conclusions, generalise and identify linkages and themes. Be alert to the causes and effects of problems and issues uncovered – you will need to explain these when you write your report.

## ***What Makes Writing Effective?***

Good writing isn't about having a great vocabulary or in-depth knowledge of grammar. Effective writing gets results – it leads to action. Therefore, it needs a clear objective, needs to be organised well and written clearly and simply. The language should be language your reader can understand without opening a dictionary or guessing: and your style should aim to be as relaxed and direct as possible (bearing in mind your relationship with your reader). Don't forget to proofread like a professional, too.

## ***Responsibilities of the Reporter***

Good reporters have a lot of responsibilities. Your job isn't 'to present the facts' – in fact, the facts, unless explained, will mean different things to different people. Your job, then, is to investigate, analyse, understand, describe, explain and recommend positive change.

Forget any ideas you have of impressing your reader with terminology. Writing tells others who we are, and you should aim to come across as focused, efficient and transparent – by organising your writing well, keeping to the point and expressing your ideas in clear and plain English.

## ***Writing Clearly***

Unclear writing is a big headache for readers. You can measure your writing clarity using the Fog Index (FI). This is a tool that counts the number of 'hard' words (words with three or more syllables) and ASL (Average Sentence Length) to give a calculation of the number of years' formal education your reader needs to understand the text first time. We should aim for a range that centres on an FI of 12. It's easy to achieve this if you follow the 'Rule of 15': 15% hard words and 15 words per sentence. Keep passive voice to around 15% also and your readability will be fine.

Short sentences help readers to understand and better concentrate, are going to be more accurate and have more impact. You can reduce sentence length by reducing unnecessary

words and getting rid of meaningless phrases. Watch out for emphasising language like 'important', 'essential', etc. – those words shout for attention and should be used with the same respect you would treat a very hot chilli. Try to avoid abstract nouns like 'implementation', 'discussion', etc. – changing these to verbs will make it sound like something is actually happening. Finally, watch out for overuse of passive voice. Only put a sentence in the passive voice if you have a good reason.

### ***Organising your Ideas***

Organise your writing 'main point first'. That's the deductive approach, sometimes called the Inverted Pyramid, used by news reporters. Whatever you write, give your conclusions first, then your main points, and, finally, support these with examples, ideas and evidence.

After your main point, use a logical sequence – time, place, order of importance or deductive / inductive approach. The inductive (scientific) approach gives the data first and conclusions last. It works, but it's not very persuasive and it's time consuming.

The deductive approach gives the conclusions first, usually in a Topic Sentence. This sentence can give the shape / structure of the argument, but more usually offers a conclusion, interpretation, reaction or feeling.

### ***Planning***

Before drafting, profile the reader. Make sure you know who you are writing to, what your reader knows / doesn't know and what is likely to be important to her. Clarify your purpose and make a plan.

### ***Drafting***

When you draft, follow the plan. Just turn your ideas into words – organise your ideas well, keep your sentences short and don't worry about style, language and grammar too much.

### ***Editing and Design***

Next, edit your document. Check that the objectives are clear, that it's organised effectively and it's written clearly and simply. Make sure the language is appropriate and tweak the style if you want. Check it thoroughly, both with a spell checker as well as manually. Finally, design your document – consider fonts and font sizes, alignments, text boxes and images. (Always caption your images.) Make sure that it isn't too crowded, and there is enough white space so the reader can rest her eyes from time to time.

# Final Report Example

## Desperate Situation of Nepal's Children

### *Children First takes on its biggest challenge*

Children First is facing one of its biggest ever challenges as it tries to make in-roads on the critical situation facing children in Nepal.

Nepal has a mainly young population – 52% are under 18 – and most live in rural areas. However, although more than half the population are adolescents and children, their rights are not protected. In terms of health, education and rights children are very vulnerable. The majority of children (93%) live in villages while just 7% live in the towns and cities. These rural children have limited access to basic needs and social services such as health care and education.

Although the balance of the sexes is more or less even, gender discrimination against girls is widespread. Girls are less likely to attend school and are more likely to work or be married by the age of fifteen.

Children's basic needs are not met. They suffer from widespread hunger and poverty and limited access to safe water. Malnutrition is widespread, affecting over half of all children. 56% of children go hungry, leaving them vulnerable to disease. Nearly half of children are affected by severe poverty, leading to widespread child labour and depriving them of a basic education. Almost one third of children do not have access to clean water, leading to preventable diseases such as diarrhoea, which is the biggest cause of child death in Nepal.

### **Children's Health**

The children of Nepal face a crisis in terms of health. There is high child mortality due to preventable causes, and access to health care is limited. Child mortality stands at over 10%. Each year 779,000 children are born, and 78,000 of these die – 206 children every day whose deaths could have been prevented.

Diarrhoea is the single biggest killer. With many children lacking access to safe water and weakened by hunger, this disease alone claims 45,000 victims yearly. Although immunisation coverage reaches 80% of children – quite an achievement where so many children live in remote areas – one in five children are still not protected against the most common early childhood diseases. A further disturbing number of mothers – 1500 / 100,000 – die in childbirth. These 'mothers' are often children themselves, victims of early marriage, undernourished and lacking skilled childbirth attendants.

Services for children who do become sick are insufficient and hard to reach. Nepal faces a shortage of hospitals and trained child specialists. There is just one hospital for children, in the capital, while the ratio of paediatricians to children is 1:100,000. With most medical services mainly available in urban areas, this leaves little in terms of protection for village children.



All children have the right to be children ...



... but in Nepal, many children die due to preventable diseases ...

## Primary Education

Despite many efforts, education is still not guaranteed for children. Access is still limited and, while many children do enrol, only half of children complete primary level. The situation is even worse for girls.

Many children still do not have access to education. Although the number of schools seems high, the ratio of schools to children is around 1:150. Bearing in mind that in remote areas schools tend to be small, and the majority of schools tend to be in towns and cities, this leaves many children excluded.

Even so, 70% of children are enrolled at primary level. However, the drop out rate is high, and only slightly over half (53%) of children actually complete primary education. Children drop out for many reasons. For example, the parents may not be able to afford to educate their children and the children become labourers.

For girls, the chances of being educated are even lower. Girls are discriminated against in education. While 79% of boys enrol at primary school, just 61% of girls do.

## Children's Rights

The state of children's rights in Nepal is appalling. Child labour and early marriage are widespread; girls are victims of trafficking; and there are children living on the streets and in prison.

One-in-four children is a child labourer. A shocking 2.6 million children work, deprived of education and the right to play. Among these, even more disturbingly, we find 40,000 bonded labourers – virtual slaves working to repay debts incurred by their families. Girls are even more likely to work than boys. In the 10-14 age group, twice as many girls work as boys, working as domestic or agricultural labourers and fetching water instead of attending school.

Similarly, widespread child marriage typically affects girls more than boys. More than one third of marriages in Nepal involve children below the age of 15, depriving girls of their right to study and putting them at risk of early pregnancy.

Trafficking of girls – mainly into India to work in the sex trade – persists. Estimates range from 5000 – 7000 girls yearly.

Finally, there are the issues of street children and children in prison. Around 5000 children live and work on the streets of the nation's cities, at high risk of violence, drug abuse and sexual abuse. A further 100 children are growing up alongside adults in prison, as the state provides no protection for them.



... millions of children are at work ...



... one third marry before they are fifteen years old ...



... and only half finish primary education ...

## Conclusions

The situation of children in Nepal is critical. They suffer from high mortality due to preventable causes, and have limited access to health care.

The education situation is worrying. The completion rate at primary level is low and there is discrimination against girls. Children's rights are seriously violated through widespread child labour and early marriage, as well as girl trafficking.

Girls are further discriminated against in access to health and education, and rights, such as child labour, and vulnerability to early marriage and trafficking

## Action

The situation of Nepalese children needs urgent action. Child mortality needs to be reduced and we have to ensure that all children, including girls, get a basic education. The Government must take committed action to enforce the protection of child rights. This includes reducing and, ultimately, eliminating child labour, early marriage and girl trafficking countrywide.

Children First is working with the Government, non-governmental organisations and communities to improve the lives of children, with a particular focus on girls and on children living in the most remote areas.

We work with rural communities to improve sanitation and awareness on basic health care. Our advocacy programmes raise parents' awareness of the importance of education, especially that of girls, as well as campaign against child labour, underage marriage and trafficking.



# The Reporting Skills and Professional Writing Handbook

a practical toolkit for development professionals



"At last there is a clear, simple toolkit on report writing skills for people working in international development."

Dr. Christine Hogan  
Author of 'Facilitating Multicultural Groups'

Imagine having a process that helps you plan your research, analyse the results and have a clear plan and objective for your report (along with those conclusions and lessons learned) before you even type a word? Add to that the skills of writing - clarity, organisation, style and editing - and think of the time and energy that could be put to better use.

The end result will be better too - our clients - from grassroots NGOs through big INGOs like CARE, Oxfam and Save the Children, to Government and International Organisations such as UNICEF, seem to think so. Over the past 10 years, hundreds of such organisations have sent thousands of participants to us in Laos, Thailand, Nepal and Pakistan to attend (expensive and intensive) training courses that benefit just a few.

These same organisations have been quick to take advantage of our self-study programme on Reporting Skills and Professional Writing - enhancing their staff's writing skills while saving 1000s of working hours and 1000s of pounds in the process.

There's no longer any need to take time away from the office and fly to some distant country to squeeze your learning into a 5-day 'workshop'. Human Resource Managers no longer have to wonder how they can balance this year's training budget and who will benefit and who will lose out.

(Continues>>>)

## What is the Reporting Skills and Professional Writing Handbook?

It's a **self-study programme** that is based on the best of 10 years' experience working with INGOs, NGOs, GOs and IOs over hundreds of training courses. It's available on **CDROM** for convenient desktop study, and, for larger organisations, the Trainer Edition is supported by a complete **Training Pack**.

Along with the CD you get the entire programme as a **free PDF Ebook** which can be downloaded right away. With over 230 pages of explanations and tasks, it's complete.

Whether you use the Ebook only, or follow the steps using the CD, you can learn the skills of analysis, planning, drafting and editing effective reports without having to interrupt your busy schedule.

Reporting skills can be learned, just like any other skill. This Handbook takes readers through the entire reporting process from setting objectives, through data gathering and analysis tools, to planning, drafting, editing and designing the report.

It's not that difficult! This programme is full of clear explanations and examples, frequent practical exercises, and an extended case study to fully apply all the tools presented. This is not just a 'book about reporting skills' - this practical guide will give you the skills to:

- Set **evaluation goals** - know what you are doing before you start
- Select **data gathering methods** - select the best way to get breadth and depth of information efficiently and economically
- **Analyse quantitative and qualitative data** - really understand what your data is telling you
- **Plan the report** - put your ideas into a structure that works
- **Write more clearly** and **organise your ideas** and analysis effectively - getting to the point in a powerful, persuasive style
- **Edit and design** the final result for impact



(from Page 1) **ALL THE BEST OF ELD's EXPERIENCE** is now available in an **easy-to-follow, stress-free** self study programme for just **a fraction of the cost of face-to-face training** that can fit alongside any development worker's busy schedule. For as little as £20 you can learn all the skills taught in our Reporting Skills training - easily saving £100s on training fees and travel - all in your own time without interrupting your work.

Unlike a face-to-face training with ELD, you **DON'T NEED** to budget: over two hundred pounds as training fee PLUS travel to an ELD training centre in Thailand, Nepal or Turkey PLUS visa costs PLUS accommodation PLUS living expenses PLUS **ONE WEEK OF YOUR VALUABLE TIME**. That's easily more than a thousand pounds in real cost, if you can actually find a training course. (Very few organisations offer such a specific report writing training, and some charge up to £1500 per person for training fees alone.)

And, if you are a Human Resources Manager, **imagine training ALL your staff for less than £20 each!** There's no longer any need for expensive in-house consultants. With the Trainer Edition, you get a complete training pack - slides, handouts, trainer guide - 'the works' - and reinforce the learning through structured sessions. The Training Pack is neatly divided into 30 hours over 10 x 3-hour sessions, so you can reduce the intensiveness and increase the effectiveness of the programme - all this for **less than the real cost of sending just ONE participant on a training course.**

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## What's in the Handbook?

The Handbook is spread over 8 easy-to-follow modules that cover ALL the steps of the writing process.

**Module One - Professional Writing & the Writing Process** (19 pages) is an introduction to the programme, and clarifies what Professional Writing is and what makes writing effective. Also introduced is the Writing Process - Analysis, Planning, Drafting & Editing.

**Module Two - Setting Objectives and Data Gathering Methods** (21 pages) covers the preparatory phase of the investigation: setting objectives, developing the research plan and selecting the data gathering methods. The module also looks at evaluation reports, progress reports and investigations based on Terms of Reference.

**Module Three - Analysing and Interpreting Information** (46 pages) looks at how to interpret statistics before moving onto the three steps of data analysis. In the extended case study which runs through the programme, we turn a fact sheet on children's issues into a report structure and finally into a Mind Map of interrelated issues.

**Module Four - Planning the Report** (14 pages) covers the planning phase. The tools of SPR (Subject / Purpose / Reader) analysis and Reader Profiling are practised and the case study analysis is now developed into a clear plan for the report.

**Module Five - Writing Skills - Clarity** (30 pages) is the second writing skills component and investigates how to get your message across and improve the impact of your writing. The module demonstrates how to measure how clear your writing is and gives you some simple, effective tools for improving the power of your sentences.

**Module Six - Writing Skills - Organisation** (25 pages) presents the deductive / Inverted Pyramid approach to organising writing, before looking at the various ways to present the main points. The second half of the module deals specifically with organising persuasive paragraphs that synthesise both interpretation as well as supporting ideas, examples and evidence.

**Module Seven - Putting it all Together** (35 pages) takes the practical work to a new level. The analysis and the plan, together, with the writing skills are applied to develop an extended report. This module is almost entirely task-based, walking readers step-by-step through the drafting process.

**Module Eight - Finishing Off the Report** (41 pages) completes the programme, covering writing the summary, designing the cover page, page layout, using visuals, writing style and the editing process. The programme ends with a summary of the main points covered and visual review of the entire programme.





## The CDROM

The CDROM contains all the information and exercises in the PDF Handbook in a navigable format so you can:

- Conveniently browse the Handbook on any PC
- Navigate from page to page smoothly

## The Trainer Edition

With the Trainer Edition you can conveniently reinforce the lessons in the Handbook through structured, well-planned sessions for your staff. For a fraction of the cost of sending your team on training, you can pass on the benefits of ELD's years' of experience through this 'workshop-in-a-box'. This is included **free** with the 50-user licence.

Conducting structured training will help you **increase the impact** of the programme and make sure all staff acquire the skills of effective reporting.

The Handbook's eight modules are packaged as a 30-hour training programme which can be delivered in one intensive course or spread out over a number of weeks.

As well as **convenience**, the **low cost** of the Trainer Edition compares favourably to the expense of sending even one participant on a 5-day training course.

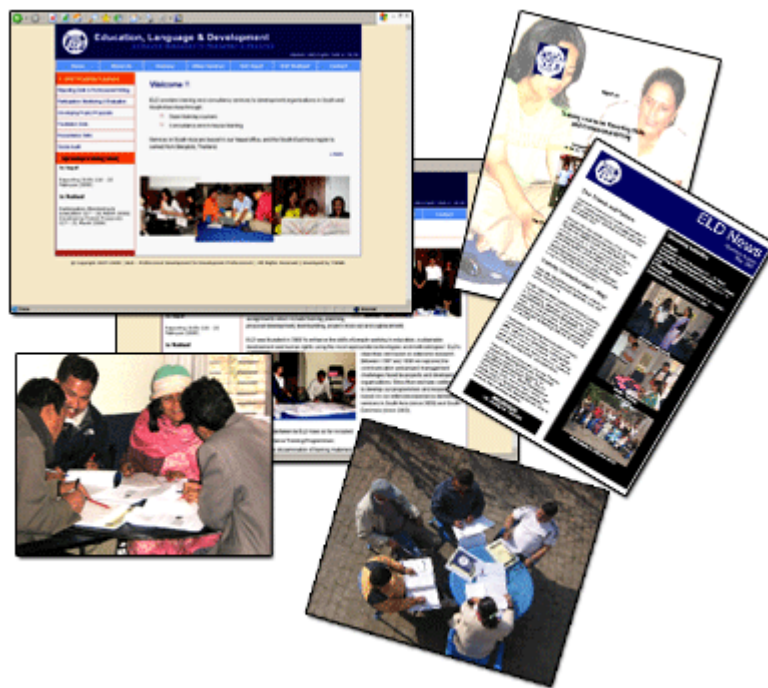
The pack includes **session-by-session notes**, tips on preparation and delivery and course monitoring & evaluation tools. Any trainer with good people management skills can facilitate this straightforward programme. There are **over 250 PowerPoint slides**, broken down into the eight thematic modules of the programme, providing powerful visual support to the learning activities and discussion. **Participant handouts** are ready to print, and ordering a Licence + Training Pack means all your team will have access to the full Handbook and CD for reference and self-study. Included also are **supplementary materials** - daily feedback forms, evaluation form, cut-up tasks and colour graphs for data analysis, and a model report based on the case study central to the course.

This training has been successfully conducted by ELD since 2002, benefiting 1000s of development professionals from a wide range of organisations, backgrounds and nationalities. There are many reports at the ELD website to show you how the training works in practice. **Let your organisation benefit from our experience** with the latest version of this powerful but simple course by ordering the Trainer Edition.



## About ELD

Education, Language and Development Training Programmes provides practical training and consultancy services to development organisations in South and South-East Asia. Registered as a charity in the United Kingdom, but based in Kathmandu, Nepal and Bangkok, Thailand, ELD conducts regular open training workshops in areas such as Reporting Skills Project Proposal Writing and PM&E, as well as a range of in-house assignments which include training, planning, proposal development, teambuilding, project close-out and outplacement. ELD was founded in 2000 *'to enhance the skills of people working in education, sustainable development and human rights using the most appropriate technologies and methodologies'*. ELD's objectives are based on extensive research. Between 1997 and 1999 we explored the communication and project management challenges faced by projects and development organisations. Since then we have continued to develop our programmes and responses based on our extensive experience delivering services in South Asia (since 2000) and South-East Asia (since 2003).



## About the Author

Neil Kendrick has directed UK charity Education, Language and Development Training Programmes since it was founded in 2000, and was responsible for setting up ELD's Nepal and Thailand operations. An experienced evaluator, facilitator and trainer specialising in Development Communication, Neil has worked with development sector participants for more than 10 years. He has trained thousands of professionals at all levels throughout South and South-East Asia in Reporting Skills, Professional Writing, Project Planning and Proposal Writing. Prior to ELD, Neil spent several years with the British Council at Istanbul, Bangkok, Hong Kong and Kathmandu.

Participants describe his training approach as relaxed and well-informed, and regularly mention his ability to demystify learning through easy explanation and examples. That same style has been brought to this Handbook, getting complex points and sophisticated tools across in a no-nonsense, easy to grasp way.



## Who's using the Handbook?

The flexibility and relevance of this programme is clear from the range of organisations that use it. These include:

Asian Development Bank  
ADRA  
Asian Institute of Technology  
Baptist World Aid  
Belgian Technical Cooperation  
Bielefeld University  
Bioversity International  
Birmingham University  
Burnet Institute  
CABI  
Capacity Building Initiative  
CARE  
CGIAR  
Concern Worldwide

Diakonia  
European Centre for Development  
Policy Management  
Family Health International  
GTZ  
International Institute for  
Development Studies  
International Atomic Energy Authority  
Medecines Sans Frontiers  
Overseas Development Institute  
PATH  
Save the Children UK  
Save the Children USA  
Swiss Development Cooperation

UNAIDS  
UNDP  
UNECA  
UNEP  
UNICEF  
UNOPS  
USAID  
WFP  
World Agroforestry Centre  
World Health Organisation  
World Wildlife Fund for Nature  
Conservation

# How to Order

## For Individuals

	GBP	Buy Online	Pay by Bank Draft
Single-user Licence: PDF Handbook (download only)	£20	✓	✗
PDF Handbook / CDROM (includes <b>FREE immediate download</b> of Handbook)	£40	✓	✓

## For Organisations

All organisation licences include **free immediate download** of PDF Handbook plus one master CDROM by mail. Licence type indicates number of copies which may be distributed electronically / number of PCs on which CDROM can be copied.

The Trainer Edition has all the contents and benefits of the Standard Edition PLUS a Training Pack comprising of Trainer Guide, PowerPoint slides, Participant Notes and Supplementary Materials.

Licence Type	Rate per User	Total GBP	Buy Online	Pay by Bank Draft
10-user licence (Standard Edition)	£30	<u>£300</u>	✓	✓
10-user licence (Trainer Edition)	-	<u>£500</u>	✓	✓
25-user licence (Standard Edition)	£24	<u>£600</u>	✓	✓
25-user licence (Trainer Edition)	-	<u>£750</u>	✓	✓
50-user licence Trainer Edition (Training Pack included <b>FREE</b> )	£18	<u>£900</u>	✓	✓
Prices for all CDs include <b>free shipping worldwide</b> .				

Organisations that wish to purchase licences may also pay directly by bank draft to our bank in Bangkok, Thailand. See [www.reportingskills.org/order.htm](http://www.reportingskills.org/order.htm) for details or contact [sales@reportingskills.org](mailto:sales@reportingskills.org).

### Education, Language and Development Training Programmes

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