



## TECHNICAL REPORT WRITING FOR ENGINEERS

### TAILORING YOUR REPORT FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

**Richard Summers, Associate Director, Arup:** When you're writing a report, sometimes that report is for a client who's paying for a project but doesn't necessarily understand the engineering concepts. Or you might be writing a report for a Network Rail engineer who's going to sign off the technical content of that report. Therefore, you have to judge what's important for those individuals in terms of what they understand from the summary and the technical content. Technical content is going to be more important to the Network Rail person. The summary is going to be far more important to that client who doesn't necessarily understand all the technical content.

**Jane Healey Brown, Associate Director, Arup:** It's really important in report writing to understand who your audience is. You then need to tailor your report in terms of its format and its technical content to that audience. So if we're dealing with technical people, that might be other consultants, it might be technical officers at a local authority, for example, then you can dive straight into the technical information and peruse a lot of technical terminology. It's always useful to make sure that the information, perhaps, is contained in a glossary, all abbreviations are set out in full first time. That should be done their standard.

But the technical report for a technical audience can be very different for a non-technical audience. So a non-technical audience could be, perhaps, a developer who hasn't got the background in the particular area that you're writing about. It could be local authority officers, it could be elected councillors, or it could be members of the public. In which case, you need to change the terminology that you use. Not to dumb it down, but to explain it in a clear way that is understandable by that audience.

**Rick Arnell, Materials Application Engineer, Rolls Royce:** Yeah, you definitely have to pitch the report at different people. So I would often advise to go and find a report that's similar to what you're trying to write because then you know how to pitch the language and the tone, and whether to use technical terms, how long it needs to be, all of that kind of stuff. You're not going to be the first person writing this kind of report, so go and find something similar to set your baseline.

**Maurice Poole, Operations Maintenance Engineer, London Underground:**  
There have been times when I've done a technical report, however, I've changed that



report because of the audience that it's actually going to. Whereby, if the audience itself is going to an investment committee, rather than the technical aspect of the report for engineers who need to do a technical fix, because of needed money to actually invest within that particular process, or the product that needs to come out of it to make the system better. So I've actually rewritten it in terms for those particular types of audience.

**Ronald Gulliver, Chartered Civil Engineer, Kier Construction:** It is important that a report is tailored to the audience. If you're talking to an accountant, it needs to have lots of numbers and facts in. If you're giving a report to the general public, they may need more facts and reasonings and the wider picture. The important thing is to understand the brief of the report. Someone has asked for this report to be produced. So you should have a topic, an audience, and what you're out to achieve with it.

**Dr Ziad Azar, Technical Project Manager/Design Engineer, Siemens:** We have different levels of reports and it depends on who you're communicating with. So if you're communicating with people with the same technical level as you, then you need to talk about details, how things happened, how findings have been reached. If you need to talk with managers higher up, or if you need to talk with more business-wise people, then you need to focus more on finding conclusions, the business case of your work, as well as what are the risks. So it's dependent on the level of, or depends on the people you're communicating with through this report.