

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aims to determine whether students who have undergone basic report writing training have the necessary skills required to produce a written business report that meets with the 'acceptability' standards of reports in the workplace. It is a preliminary investigation into target situation requirements for the purpose of answering the following research questions:

1. What are the criteria by which 'acceptability' is measured in the workplace with regard to written analytical reports?
2. Do students' reports measure up to these criteria? If not, why?
3. What are the gatekeepers', students', and course instructors' opinions on measures to be taken in making the reports more acceptable to the intended audience?
4. What are the implications of the above on the Report Writing component in the English for Business course?

This chapter will present the results of the study. It will be divided into five sections (4.2 – 4.6). The first two sections present the results obtained from Employer Questionnaire I and the pre-interview on the report writing practices in the selected organisation and on the ‘acceptability’ criteria for written analytical reports respectively. Section 4.4 presents results of the gatekeepers’ evaluation of the reports that was obtained from the post questionnaire/editorial worksheet and interview. The results will determine whether students’ reports measured up to the criteria of an acceptable report, thus addressing research question 3. Sections 4.5 – 4.6 present the results of Employer, Student and Teacher Questionnaires and interviews as an attempt to answer research questions 3 and 4 respectively.

4.2 REPORT WRITING ACTIVITIES

Basically, it can be said that business reports form a prominent feature in both the gatekeepers’ job undertakings, with some differences in the degree of relevance of certain types of reports as well as in the time spent on activities related to reports. The gatekeepers indicated the relevance of certain types of reports to their jobs by ranking them along a scale of most relevant (1) to least relevant (5). Results show that for GK 1, analytical reports together with feasibility studies and proposals were more relevant to his job as a Marketing Manager than informational reports, which he did not often write. This is indicated by a ranking of (5) given to Progress reports, Status and Annual reports on a scale of most frequent (1) to least frequent (5). With analytical reports, the most frequently written were problem-solving, market research

and corporate planning reports. The gatekeeper also stated that reports on product development would be another type of analytical report relevant to his job.

GK 2's response differed slightly from GK 1 in that she found informational reports to be more relevant to her job as Senior Manager of Administration than analytical reports. The types of informational reports most frequently written were progress reports followed by operational, status and annual reports. The Market Research report is indicated to be the most frequently written analytical report, followed by problem solving, policy review and corporate planning respectively in that order.

These differences could be attributed to each of the gatekeepers' different job demands and fields. GK 2's responsibilities in the administration of the organisation such as human resource and personnel administration, operations and methods, legal and secretarial matters, and general administration of the organisation required preparation and handling of written documents which contain information necessary for day-to-day functioning and maintenance of the organisation, such as that characteristic of informational reports. This is true because when inquired about the kinds of managerial decisions made from each of the types of reports, she stated that while analytical reports test and provide solutions to problems, informational reports provide the basic information necessary for the maintenance and well being of the organisation.

The Employer Questionnaire 1 (Q1) given out in the study also sought feedback on the time spent on different activities related to reports. The gatekeepers indicated this by ticking one of five alternatives: all the time, most of the time, half of the time, little of the time and none. Table 1 outlines the gatekeepers' feedback on this.

Table 1: Time spent on activities related to reports

	All the time	Most of the time	Half of the time	Little of the time	None
GK 1		Read reports Do research for writing reports	Write reports Listen to report presentation. Assist others in writing reports	Edit reports	
GK 2	Read reports	Write reports	Edit reports Do research for writing reports	Listen to report presentation Assist others in writing reports	

As Table 1 shows, the two gatekeepers spent a considerable portion of their time reading reports. Other than that, all other activities received different attention and emphasis between the gatekeepers. Again, these differences appear to be job specific. Certain activities like carrying out research for writing a report, for instance, apply more to GK 1's position as Marketing Manager. It was expressed in the interview that when conducting a market study, for example, he would have to find out such information like market segmentation, market share, the company's

present status, the kinds of costing to be done and so forth, which require a certain amount of research on both his part and that of his executives. Tasks like product development requires some external research such as sending reports out and getting feedback from customers concerning features of the product, its quality and the quality of his customer service.

The argument that job differences determine the amount of time devoted to those activities was further backed up by GK 2's comments during the interview. It was stated that her job in overseeing administrative functions required her to read and understand documents, summarizing them whenever needed. The Marketing Manager (GK 1), on the other hand, spent a considerable amount of time looking for new businesses. There are, therefore, two quite different kinds of involvement in their various job related functions. On this note, it is also possible to say that the way they approach report writing tasks also reflected their degree of involvement in activities related to reports. This can be gauged from GK 1's response to a question asked about who often wrote analytical reports. According to him, besides himself, his executives sometimes undertook the task of writing but with a lot of guidance from him. It can thus be understood why an activity such as assisting others in writing reports applied more to his situation than GK 2.

On the activity of editing reports, it was not made clear why this was not as prevalent for GK 1 as the other activities. The interview data actually shows the reverse in that editing of reports seems to be a rather prominent activity for both gatekeepers.

According to GK 1, a lot of his time was spent editing reports written by his executives as well as those written by other Senior Managers like himself. It was in fact common practice in the organisation that the Senior Managers vet each others' reports/writing. Perhaps this inconsistency in responses is caused by the way the word 'edit' was understood and used. According to GK 2, editing to her is not so much editing (*per se*) but commenting and providing feedback so that 'we could discuss such things as what to include, what should be done and how much more to spend'.

All in all, despite differences and contradictions in responses, results show that reports occupy quite an important position in the business organisation. In addition, there is a positive answer from both gatekeepers that good report writing ability is important and necessary in their fields, especially for business operations. Good report writing ability is also reported by GK 2, in her capacity as manager of Administration, to be very important for staff appraisals, and important for career development.

In connection with the above, report writing may play an even bigger role in times of economic downturn. There was a general agreement between the two gatekeepers that the frequency of writing reports in their organisation had changed with the economic downturn; not in terms of type or quality but more so in terms of the frequency of writing reports to communicate the organisation's plans and strategies in tackling the situation. In this case, more reports will have to be written but within

a shorter time, which necessitates an increase in trained personnel for the organisation. With reference to this study, it thus appears important for ESP practitioners to take measures in improving further the teaching and writing of business reports for ESP students.

4.3 'ACCEPTABILITY' CRITERIA FOR ANALYTICAL REPORTS

This particular section outlines the results of the pre-questionnaire and interview in an attempt to answer research question 1: What are the criteria by which 'acceptability' is measured in the workplace with regard to analytical reports?

It is important to pinpoint here that feedback from both GK 1 and GK 2 will be treated separately to allow for variations in perceptions. This means that no attempt will be made to standardise the responses because preliminary analysis of the questionnaire and interview data revealed the following:

1. There was a slight difference in viewpoints concerning report types and activities due to job demands.
2. Although some criteria looked for in reports appear similar between GK 1 and GK 2, the degree of importance each gatekeeper attached to a particular criterion may have had a determining effect on how the reports were evaluated.

3. Unlike GK 2, GK 1's feedback on criteria for reports may not be representative of the organisation.

The gatekeepers were required to indicate the criteria looked for in an analytical report in two ways. The first required them to tick one of four alternatives as to whether a given criterion is important in determining the 'acceptability' of a written report. The four alternatives were 1) very important, 2) important, 3) quite important and 4) not very important. The second required them to provide details on the criteria by writing out the features that should be present for each one.

4.3.1 Gatekeeper 1 (GK 1): Senior Manager, Marketing

Results show that GK 1 regards Content, Organization, Format , Layout and Visual support as 'important' in a report, whereas Language and Style are only 'quite important' .To substantiate his responses, GK 1 provided a write-up on the characteristics/features of the criteria which determine whether a written analytical report meets 'acceptability' standards in the organisation (Appendix N). As the information contained in the write-up is important for purposes of discussion, it will be reproduced here in excerpts according to the topic concerned. The original wording was not changed in order to retain the authenticity of the data.

4.3.1.1 Content

Table 2 shows the write-up on Content provided by GK 1 in the questionnaire.

Table 2: Write-up on Content : GK 1

The definition of 'content' to me is VERY large. However, to make it more simplified, the type of content will depend on two major factors:

- The type of proposal or report
- The targeted audience

The paper that is being prepared needs to be tailored towards the intended audience, for instance, in the preparation of a Business Plan for a new company. Where the intended audience would normally be a potential investor. From an investor's point of view, they are only interested in the following:

- What are we going to do i.e. what kind of business are we going to be involved in
- How much investment are we looking for
- How are we going to spend it
- What kind of returns can they expect to get and in what time period
- Some form of financial summary with its full details in the appendix

Somehow or rather, the writer needs to summarize all of this in the beginning of the paper i.e. in the Executive Summary section. Other types of information or content such as the Management, the full description of the products etc. will come as a support.

This is just one example of proposal/report writing that is intended to a specific audience. A similar paper targeted to another type of audience will have to be approached differently even though the content would be similar. Emphasis on specific issues will have to be handled differently.

GK 1's viewpoints on the necessary features of Content show concern for two main aspects. They are 1) type of report, and 2) intended audience. It appears from his description that for the content of a report to be acceptable, it has to meet the needs

and purpose of the audience. Audience awareness appears to be a very important element in report writing due to the way reports or any other written documents are read in the workplace. The interview held with GK 1 revealed that reports are read selectively by readers according to the use they will make of a document. This kind of a rhetorical situation can best be illustrated by one of GK 1's comments in the interview below:

....if I'm writing this business plan for a potential investor, I will always play the role of the investor. I wouldn't want to read a lot of things. I only want to see whether the product is good, how much you want, what are you gonna spend it on and what's my return. Everything else is irrelevant because once I have the money I don't have time to read too many things.....Usually the guy goes straight to the financial section and skip the other sections...and the recommendations....okay..they sign it, go.

Anderson (in Odell & Goswami, 1985) in addressing this topic on audience awareness found that related studies show that writers at work address different kinds of readers, classified accordingly from that internal and external to the organisation. Within the organisation, the kinds of readers also vary. Some readers read to decide whether to approve or reject the report, some read and give the report to others, some will take action upon it and lastly some readers would merely read and file the report. Thus, target audience appears to be an important consideration in most organisational writing tasks.

Conciseness appears to be another feature necessary for Content. Sydow Campbell et.al. (1999: 73) citing Riley et.al. (1999) writes that conciseness means 'saying what needs to be said in the fewest number of words without sacrificing any important information or creating an undesirable tone'. The reason for this may be associated with the very nature of the reading process that readers adopt in organisations, as illustrated by some of GK 1's comments below:

" Everything else is irrelevant because once I have the money I don't have time to read too many things. I need to try to put all these things in a clear form in the Executive summary....." After doing a few reports people at the higher rank has no time to read too many things...they just look at it and then try to gauge what the paper is all about....."

".....it depends on the audience, The investor would say okay, good enough...then he'll pass this to the people that will go through it properly but the initial process of getting through the first layer – the potential investor- has to be quick and snappy – something straight to the point, no crap no nothing...."

The interview also revealed other possible criteria for an analytical report in the organisation. Firstly, there should be maximum analyses of points. This means that although in reading the report, different readers select different parts of the report, one still has to treat the topic/issue addressed in the report as thoroughly as possible for other readers, both first liners and second liners to look at the report in detail and to have areas verified and checked upon, evaluated and acted upon when necessary. According to GK 1, the writer still has to include information about every single thing; the product and the industry; assuming that the people reading it 'knows next to nothing about the whole thing. If the reader knows h/she will just skip because

your Table of Content will tell you where everything is'. It appears that the content of the report not only has to be concise but complete as well.

Secondly, technical competence is also important in a report. This kind of an expectation is probably understood on the grounds that one has to have the 'necessary background knowledge and industry knowledge' to be able to include the necessary details and analyse them to the maximum. GK 1's response to a question on technical competence contains the gist of this argument:

"....I need to get..(pause)..I need to ask them (his executives) what do you think about that, what do you think the industry going to be.....intriguing questions...what is this, what is that. I have to ask them a lot of 'what if' questions like 'what if this happens and the why'; 'what if my competitors use this?' so lots of scenario...."

4.3.1.2 Organization

Organization in an analytical report is regarded to be just as important as Content. GK 1 substantiated this viewpoint by providing a write-up detailing the role of organization in a written report, as shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Write-up on Organization : GK 1

In organizing a paper, I find it very useful to actually prepare the ToC (Table of Content) first. It helps me prepare my train of thought. It also helps the writer to be more focused at the same time, if the mind starts to wonder, the ToC will assist in putting everything in perspective. For example, let's look at the basic preparation of a New product Business Plan. Once again, before writing anything, think about the targeted audience. Let's assume here that the target audience is the company's senior Management. This is an example of how I would handle the ToC.

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
 - The Industry
 - The Economy
- The product Overview
 - Detailed Product Description
 - Description/Definition
 - Usage
- Cost of development or Set-up
- Marketing Plan
 - Pricing Mechanism
 - Pricing Model
 - Target Market
 - Socio Economic
- SWOT Analysis
- Market Analysis/Market Acceptance
- Projected Revenue
- Financial Highlights – Projected Profit and Loss
- Conclusion/Recommendation and Suggestions
- Appendix (if required)

Note: The above example cannot be seen as an accepted format by the industry.

This is just an example of how organization is crucial to the report writing. The train of thought and the self-organization of the writer must be clearly laid out before any studies or survey is done.

From GK 1's writeup, it can be said that good organization in a report plays two main functions: 1) It assists the writer in planning for points to include in the report and 2) It indicates to the reader the emphasis and organization of the facts in the report. In addition to these two points, the interview data shows that a written outline; via the Table of Content (ToC); allows GK 1 to identify parts of the report that any one of his executives can write out or act/research upon. Again, audience awareness plays a central role in determining what information to include and in what way.

Perhaps one salient point concerning the organization of a report is that there appears to be no standardized and uniform format that one should follow. GK 1 made the following statements concerning organization and the role of the ToC.

“ The important one will be my Executive Summary or if I need to give my financial analysis..projection but the middle part (referring to written example of ToC) I change as I go along.....this product will have this kind of information...”

It appears that an Executive Summary is a necessary component in a report, in that it contains the gist of the whole report for readers who require a quick and ready access to the main ideas of the report. Nair (1994), in her study of the macrostructure of written proposals by professionals from the Malaysian business community, found that the Executive Summary is one of the most important elements of the proposal. It has to successfully capture the attention of top level management in order for it to

be read rather than be 'shelved'. Nair's study further reinforces the findings of this study in relation to the role of the Executive Summary in reports.

In response to a statement by the interviewee that Organization appears to be context based and dependent on audience (instead of the conventional most important to the least important arrangement of points), GK 1 had this to say:

" I think the questions you can ask your students....what is the most important thing your reader wants to see....how much you want to spend, how much you need, this is how much we can get from this.....So I don't have to tell you this product definition because the company will already know that. If need be, I will attach a company brochure. Like a Business Model...that is to do with a new product then that's different. Again it depends on the situation. There's no such thing as ABCD. I can jumble it up as long as the message gets through."

However, GK 1 was quick to point out that his example of ToC cannot be seen as an approved format by the industry (refer write-up), therefore flexibility in the organization of a report has to be regarded as a personal point of view based on his professional experiences from writing reports. Even the Background, Conclusion and Recommendation, from his point of view, can vary from convention: Conclusion and Recommendation can come together, and written out as 'my conclusion is..'. The findings can be in the Appendix whereas summarized findings can be placed in the body of the report. One interpretation that can be made from GK 1's comments is that his priority falls on what seems to be practical and what works in terms of whether communication has been achieved.

4.3.1.3 Language and Style

GK 1 finds Language and Style to be quite important in an analytical report. The priority seems to be for simplicity and conciseness, which take precedence over variations in language use. Table 4 contains the details on the language expected in a report.

Table 4: Write-up on Language : GK 1

Language and Style

The language and style of the paper can vary BUT most importantly, it **MUST** be simple to understand. If the readers do not understand what you are writing about then the reader will get turn off and not interested to read your paper! This must be avoided at all cost!!!

Hence the language must be simple, easy to understand, no jargons (if there is a need then provide a definition for it). In short, I have always found it useful to assume that the reader knows next to nothing of what I am writing about and I am educating them.

On the other hand, once again, depending on the reader, if the audience is the company's Board of Directors, then a short two to three page paper will be sufficient. All description will be in point form. Keep to the points and address critical issues.

GK 1's feedback indicated that 'Language' in a report incorporates the following elements:

- the language must be simple to understand
- all description should be in point form
- keep to the points and address critical issues.

One of the things GK 1 associated with concerning the use of simple language is jargon. It was expressed in the interview that to him the language has to be very easy for people to understand. Even when writing out the above descriptions (in the write-up), he said that he made a point to ask himself what would be the best way of explaining things without putting too many jargon in. To prove his point further on the necessity of using simple language, he cited an example of a business magazine, titled *Business 2.0*, which is easy to read because most words used are in layman terms. If and when jargon is used, an intertext containing definitions or descriptions will be placed very close to the word referred to.

It should be noted that this particular point made concerning the necessity of minimising the use of jargon is looked at from the context of GK 1's writing practices. In another context, however, jargon, or the use of technical terms, may actually be preferred especially when the readers consist of specialists who find these terms essential in their fields. Huckin and Olsen (1991) states that 'much of what it means to know a field is to know the vocabulary of the field' and that technical jargon 'helped promote communication among specialists' (1991: 491; 668).

GK 1's ideas on putting descriptions in point form, keeping to the point and addressing critical issues are partly content related and partly language. Here, these two features can be interpreted as the need to be brief and concise when writing reports. Previous discussions have shown that the Executive Summary is an example of one part of the report which requires a certain degree of conciseness for it to be

effective (see page 122). As mentioned by GK 1, “the initial process of getting through the first layer, the potential investor has to be quick and snappy-something straight to the point; no crap no nothing”.

Perhaps, GK 1’s preference for simple language can be better illustrated by his comments below on the writing skills of local graduates:

“They use too many big wordslah. Sometimes I know they’re trying to impress me – they use Thesaurus on the Net right? What is that!”

In addition, when asked whether he uses formal language such as that characteristic of business language and style, including the use of passive versus active language, GK 1 indicated that he had no time for such ‘technicalities’ in language use. His main concern is for communication, that is, for the message to get through to the readers. Again, he quoted an example of his own discursive practice to prove his point: Instead of writing ‘this Business Model was done by.....’ in the report introduction, he would put a check mark on the word Business Model, indicating to his colleagues that he has carried out certain actions. A similar style is adopted for reports written for external purposes, in that, instead of a check mark, GK 1 would include keys such as ‘Description: action done’. In all this, he added, the language used is still ‘simple and straight to the point’.

It can be said that even though the style of writing adopted by GK 1 is largely individual, it nonetheless serves the purpose of being direct, concise and purposeful

when communicating with the readers. The findings of this study can be supported by Anderson's (in Odell and Goswami, 1985) findings that among other skills, workers need to be able to write clearly and concisely at work. In terms of style, he also found a common preference for individual style by 273 managers who found value in adopting their own 'individual style, language and phrasing in writing instead of some standardized, uniform business style ('businessese')' (1985: 54).

4.3.1.4 Format and Layout

GK 1 sees Format and Layout to be important in a report. The criterion seems to be that there is no one standardized format in a report as long as the readers are able to follow the discussion within. However, consideration is for Presentation of the report instead of Format and Layout on its own. Based on this response, the discussions that follow in this chapter will address the topic on Format and Layout as Presentation. Table 5 shows the detailed write-up produced by GK 1 on Format and Layout/Presentation.

Table 5: Write-up on Format and Layout : GK 1

Format & Layout

This is one of the areas that a lot of people seem to miss out. The question of what type of format is applicable is not the question. It is more how you present the paper that is more important, i.e. for example, are the graphics that you are using suitable and further explains the paragraph? Are the statistical summary and detailed summary indexed in the right manner so as to let the reader find it easily? In short, the positioning of the graphics, tables, charts etc. must collaborate with the information being included in the paper. The information must be accessible for the reader without them having to thumb around the paper. Another criteria to this is a good page numbering system and a good reference system.

Formatting styles vary from one individual to another. All that I am concern is more on the relevancy of the format, i.e. if the reader understands the paper, then the format is irrelevant.

The interview data gives further details on Presentation in a report, which includes the use and positioning of visuals such as graphics, tables, diagrams and the like as well as the whole layout of the report. According to GK 1, diagrams used must serve the purpose of helping to explain and support the information provided in the report and not as mere illustrations. In terms of positioning and layout of a visual, direct reference should be made to it so information will be readily accessible to the readers. The following comment illustrates this viewpoint:

“ So if you wanna show a flow of product cycle, show the flow next to what you are explaining. Don't go and put it somewhere else...Somebody asking me (where the diagram is) means that the diagram is at the wrong page. The reader must be able to find it easily without asking you where it is.”

4.3.1.5 Visual Support

Visual support is also related to Presentation in providing a supporting role to the report. GK 1 finds visuals important not only in helping readers understand his paper/report better but in gaining readers' interests. Table 6 shows the features of visuals in a report.

Table 6: Write-up on Visual Support: GK 1

Visual Support
Pictures and charts and alike are only as important if it provides as a supporting role to the paper. If it is not, then these are useless. However, visuals can play an important role in providing an overview to the reader. But beware, an illustration of an overview may seem sufficient to the writer but at times it can confuse the reader. I use a lot of visual for the purpose of making the reader understanding my paper more. It also acts as a means to keep the reader awake and interested in your paper.

The following is a summary of the questionnaire and interview data showing the features of a given criteria looked for in an ' acceptable' analytical report, listed out in order of importance. Analysis of the data shows that concerns on the criteria can be divided into two broad categories, based on their relationship to the following skills.

- A. Writing skills and report writing skills to do with the textual features of the report.
- B. General skills

A. GENERAL WRITING SKILLS AND REPORT WRITING SKILLS

Content

- meets purpose of report
- meets audience needs
- concise and complete
- maximum analyses of points/ matter under consideration
- background knowledge and industry knowledge necessary

Organization

- does not necessarily follow a standardized way
- indicates to the reader the emphasis and organization of the facts
- assists the writer in planning for the points to include (non-textual)

Language & Style

- simple and easy to understand
- concise and straight to the point
- communicates the intended message
- individual style and creativity are allowed so long as the message is conveyed

Presentation

- visual support/diagrams/illustrations must serve a purpose
- visuals used are relevant to the topic/paragraph
- Information must be easily accessible to readers
- Format is not standardized but one that helps readers follow the discussion in the report

B. GENERAL SKILLS

The interview data revealed information on other skills not directly related to textual features of a written report but more to the overall tasks of report writing. They are as follows:

- analytical and reasoning abilities
- information processing skills
- research skills and ability to apply knowledge to a given situation

A few comments made by GK 1 have been provided below to show instances when these skills may figure in the report writing process:

“ I have to guide them so I started by telling them (the executives) how to get the info. When they get the info.....I ask them what do these figures tell me....(Don't) just give me numbers – tell me what they mean. Tell me what you think.....Okay, tell me what this thirty percent means. If I do this, how will it affect my thirty percent?”

“ When they start doing reports, they don't know how to get the information. For example, if they say, how do I know who my competitors are and I say you look at what we have. We are selling financially related product, then you go back to the Net and refer financial services in Malaysia, you know simple information like this they don't know.”

“ If you tell them to do a marketing proposal then they start looking at the book. Some things are not relevant. I see this in one of my executives...he says “En.....I'm sure this would work.” Then I say “How do you know?” Because Kotler said so! To me the textbook is just a guide. The way the digital economy is going, traditional marketing is out so the way we do paper, especially if you do a paper on the Net, three weeks is a bit too long.”

The researcher had the opportunity of viewing a report written by GK 1 (for reasons of confidentiality, the report cannot be attached in the appendix). The sample report reflects the principles of report writing he has talked about – something brief and straight to the point. Since it was a status report on two products, a product description was given but very briefly, mostly in point form. Simple language was used, mainly to briefly describe features of the products. The introduction consisted of check marks/ticks which can be readily understood by colleagues since the report was for internal purposes. According to GK 1, they were to indicate that he had carried out certain actions.

The report he wrote was very brief, with the recommendations being given more emphasis. More detailed descriptions were placed in the Appendix. This kind of approach, according to him had always worked. Most interesting was his layout. The texts were indented on both sides (that is, the width of the right and left margins were expanded) to allow for diagrams and illustrations, thus showing some element of originality/creativity. This also reflected the importance he placed on getting the message across as effectively as possible to readers.

The last part of the questionnaire sought the gatekeepers' opinion on reports written by fresh graduates. Results show that the standards expected in written reports are applicable to fresh graduates. The executives working for GK 1 were a mix of local and foreign graduates. GK 1 rated the reports written by local graduates as deficient,

with frequent problems in all areas – Content, Organization, Language, Style and Format.

From the feedback obtained thus far, an 'Acceptability' Criteria Rating List has been drawn up, showing the criteria by which 'acceptability' is measured in a written analytical report, from the perspective of GK 1 (see Tables 2-6). As far as possible, the words and phrases used by GK 1 in their original form in the write-up and the interview were retained. It was however necessary for the researcher to restructure and reword some comments and statements (retaining the original meaning as much as possible) so that they can be included here.

'ACCEPTABILITY' CRITERIA RATING LIST: GATEKEEPER 1 (GK 1)

Content

1. The content should meet the audience's needs and purposes of reports.
2. The report must be concise yet complete (answers the questions which potential readers are likely to be interested in). The content should provide only the necessary information – something quick, snappy and straight to the point.
3. There should be maximum analysis of points. Provides the necessary information needed for decision making.
4. There is evidence of the writer's background and industry knowledge.

Organization

1. The organization of points need not be standardized but should assist the readers in pinpointing important areas to look at. An Executive Summary that gives a good overview of the report and thus captures the readers' attention immediately should be provided.
2. The organization of the points should indicate to the readers the emphasis and organization of the facts. A good Table of Contents should be provided for this purpose.

Language and Style

1. The language used must be simple and easy to understand. Descriptions should be provided whenever jargon is used.
2. The language must be concise and straight to the point.
3. All description should be in point form. Keep to the points and address critical issues.
4. Individual style and creativity are allowed so long as they communicate the intended message.

Presentation

1. Are graphics used suitable and relevant? Do they serve a purpose by helping to explain things?
2. Is positioning of the graphics, tables, charts etc. done in the best possible way?
3. Are the statistical summary and detailed summary indexed in the right manner so that information is easily accessible to the reader?
4. Is there good page numbering system and a good reference system?
5. Although there is no standardized and uniform way of presenting the information, will the format used help readers follow the discussion ?

4.3.2 Gatekeeper 2 (GK 2): Senior Manager, Administration

There were slight differences in responses between GK 1 and GK 2 on which criteria they regard as important for an 'acceptable' analytical report. However, for the time being, these differences will not be treated as an issue of concern on the grounds that differences can exist due to job specifications and demands.

Results show that GK 2 regards Content, Organization, Language and Style to be 'very important' for an analytical report whereas Format, Layout, and Visual support are found to be 'quite important'. The features specified for each criterion will substantiate the responses given on the above.

4.3.2.1 Content

For GK 2, Content is very important because it is the 'meat' to the whole thing, and therefore is given high priority. According to GK 2, the content of a report must be focused (i.e. answers the questions) and objective. The interview results suggest that a good content is focused in a way that it meets the objective of the report or addresses and answers the questions the writer has set in the beginning. The following interview data illustrates this point:

" Content is the 'meat' of the report. So content is given high priority. I mean if it doesn't answer the question no point. You'd want to see substance so content must be good. Normally you have an objective in mind-a question in mind when you write. So you really, really have to answer the question."

In addition to being focused, the content must also be objective. It is difficult to determine whether GK 2 included this feature with reference to language or content. However, this particular finding on objectivity in a report is consistent with Sargunan's (1999) findings on what personnels in a multinational organisation regard as one of the features or characteristics of effective Contents. Objectivity, as described in her study, means that there is no biasness on the part of the writer and no emotive factors present in the report.

The content of a report must also include correct and concise data. GK 2's idea of 'conciseness' involves presenting the data in a 'straight to the point' manner without unnecessarily 'going round in circles before getting to the actual topic'. In other words, the data/information included in the report should address the issue in question as directly as possible. Language wise, expressing the data in a concise manner means that they be presented in as few words as possible. However, GK 2 finds that one still has to explain everything, suggesting that completeness could be another feature/characteristic of Content.

Additional features of Content include **technical competence, degree of analyses and audience awareness**. Although these features have been given less emphasis by GK 2 than by GK 1, they will be included here as features to consider when writing a report. Firstly, technical competence is seen to be necessary for the simple reason that technical knowledge is required in an online service industry cum IT related company which makes use of the computer network. GK 2 sees technical

competence to also be applicable to all domains including Human Resource and Administration where the technicalities involve knowledge of legal matters. Secondly, degree of analyses is required only when the report calls for a deeper treatment of the subject. Lastly, audience awareness is considered only in relation to situation and purpose. According to GK 2, the people in the organisation do not consider audience much when writing documents for internal uses than for external uses because everyone in the organisation would share common knowledge and have an understanding of the issue in question.

4.3.2.2 Organization

GK 2 regards Organization to be 'very important' simply because it would reflect the writer's train of thought. Basically, the organization of a report should include a logical arrangement of points, in that one cannot be putting objectives last and conclusions first. Most important of all, the organization of points should be coherent and unified. This can be gauged from the feedback GK 2 provided on Organization taken from her questionnaire responses below (Appendix O):

Table 7: Write-up on Organization: GK 2

Organising a report must be in synch with content must “jive”. Do not necessarily follows conventional ways of arranging content.

Upon probing, GK 2 had the following to say on what sort of things must “jive” in the report:

“Everything has to be just nice – like if you read students’ reports, they follow conventional way...well fine, nothing wrong with that. But you see, things are out of place somehow....(interviewer: Are you talking about coherence?)....Well could be. It’s like there’s no flow. Like they took a little bit (of information) here and a little bit there. So that’s what I mean things have to “jive” – objective to content, you know.”

GK 2’s ideas on good organization above are consonant with the qualities of effective report writing laid out by Lesikar & Pettit Jr. (1995). It is stated that in a well written report, each fact is in its logical place, and the relationship of each fact to other facts and to the plan of the report is clear to the reader. Thus, the parts of the report fit together, and the report reads as a unified composition. The writing quality that gives the report this smoothness is commonly called coherence. The one best contributor to coherence is good organization (1995 : 209).

Like GK 1, GK 2 feels that it is not necessary to follow conventions such as arranging points in order of most to least important. To her, unless the point serves a purpose, it should not be included only to make the report looks nice. Again, it can

be seen here that there is no prescribed or a standard way of arranging points as long as it is purposeful and points included are relevant.

4.3.2.3 Language and Style

GK 2's feedback on Language is similar to GK 1's, in that language in a report must be simple and concise for readers to grasp the information within in as little time as possible. The main reason for considering these features in language use can be understood in terms of how people will read and use the report. According to GK 2, normally she does not have reports that take her two hours to read, except maybe for business proposals. She reads very selectively in that upon getting the report, she would look at the first part (Introduction), then the Conclusion. Only after that will she scan through the whole report including the analysis (Findings) before signposting questions about the report. For a normal standard report, reading will take her about half an hour or so.

Such a reading process necessitates a report which contains simple, easy to understand language for it to be read quickly. The way she reads the report and the time she would like to spend on one also implies that the language used must also be concise. In this case, sentence length and variety do not concern her very much. Another language related feature has to do with general writing ability and expression. She made reference to this when talking about other skills necessary in report writing. In terms of style, GK 2 did not specify exactly what she would look

for but did point out that the style of some reports are 'boring' and textbookish, and that she preferred a report with 'a little bit of style and initiative'. Her feedback could be interpreted that some creativity in report writing is quite possible in the organisation.

It needs to be mentioned here why GK 1 and GK 2 place different degrees of importance to Language. In a question about this in the interview, GK 2 gave the following answer:

"Well, maybe (that the differences is job specific). He (GK 1) probably interprets language to be just words. Whereas his reports are factual – he looks for new business; goes out to find business. I deal with lots of documents. In my writing there's lots of explanation and justification...say on why I'm adopting a new agreement. I don't just have to understand new agreements but summarise them."

She gave another example which shows the important role of 'Language'. One of her tasks in the organisation includes getting approvals on a yearly calendar such as in declaring certain days a holiday for the organisation. GK 2 stated that in this case, she needs to be able to use language in a convincing manner in obtaining the required approval from the Management. To her, including statistics alone will not suffice because what counts is language. Her guiding principle seems to be that good language use will communicate better and thus convey the intended message successfully.

4.3.2.4 Format and Layout

GK 2's response on Format and Layout illustrates her opinion on not only Format and Layout but the whole report as well. The following excerpt has been taken from her write up on features looked for in Format and Layout:

Table 8: Write up on Format and Layout : GK 2

If content does meet the objective, no amount of 'fancy' formatting or layout can get the required approval.
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Her feedback supports her earlier response that Format and Layout as well as Visuals are only 'quite important' for an 'acceptable' report compared to other criteria like Content. To GK 2, having things in point form, in a table format and other graphics count only if they help to prove a point and substantiate the other information provided in the report. It was also stated in the interview that there is no prescribed format for reports but the layout including the font used and the manner in which the report is presented do make a big difference in contributing to a more effective report in a way that makes the report visually clear to the readers.

The following is a summary of the features GK 2 looks for in a report. Again, two broad categories can be seen which comprise both general writing skills and general skills on its own.

1. GENERAL WRITING SKILLS AND REPORT WRITING SKILLS

Criteria looked for:

Content

- focused. It addresses the topic/subject or objective of the report.
- data correct and expressed concisely
- points are relevant. They serve a purpose
- complete
- some analysis of points considered necessary for the purpose of the report
- shows some technical knowledge of the field

Organization

- does not follow a conventional way of arranging content
- coherent & unified
- good flow of ideas. Natural progression between points
- logical arrangement of points

Language

- objective
- simple and straight to the point. Serves to communicate a message thus flowery language is not necessary.
- concise. There is limited time so readers in organizations must be able to grasp content immediately.
- good expression

Presentation

- no prescribed format & layout
- graphics used must prove a point. Consider also point form and table format
- consider good report presentation (font, layout) for a more effective report

B. GENERAL SKILLS

- there's ability to apply knowledge to actual job situations
- some flexibility is involved so element of creativity is welcomed.

From the feedback obtained thus far, an 'Acceptability' Criteria Rating List has been drawn up, based on GK 2's perspective on the criteria for an 'acceptable' analytical report.

ACCEPTABILITY CRITERIA RATING LIST: GATEKEEPER 2 (GK 2)

Content

1. The content of a report should be focused. It should address the topic/subject or objective of the report.
2. The data included must be correct and are expressed concisely.
3. Points included should be relevant to the purpose of the report.
4. All information included should be complete.
5. Analysis of points is necessary as long as it meets the objective of the report.
6. The content shows some knowledge of the field.

Organization

1. The organization of points follow no standardized or conventional way.
2. Organization of points is coherent and unified. There is a good flow of ideas.
3. There is a logical arrangement of points.

Language

1. The language used should be objective.
2. The language must be simple and direct. Serves to communicate a message thus flowery language is not necessary.
3. The language must be concise so that readers are able to grasp the content immediately in as little time as possible.
4. There is good expression of ideas.

Presentation

1. There is no prescribed format and layout.
2. Graphics included must prove a point. Consider point form and table format in the presentation of information.
3. Consider good report presentation (font, layout) for a more effective reports.

B. GENERAL SKILLS

1. There's ability to apply knowledge to a given context.
2. Some flexibility and creativity are welcomed so long as the report fulfilled its objectives.

In summary, this section discussed the gatekeepers' feedback on what constituted an 'acceptable' analytical report. There was a general consensus that Content, Organization, Language and Style and Presentation form the criteria for such a report. The gatekeepers' feedback on the features necessary for each of these criteria point to aspects of general writing skills such as conciseness, clarity and coherence. It appears, thus, that the 'acceptability' of written reports in the selected organisation is measured by how well one exhibits good writing ability. There were, however, some features/skills which could be more distinctive of reports such as the ability to apply knowledge/points to a specific job context as well as effective use of visuals. These should not be overlooked. Lastly, some features of the composing process were also emphasized indicating that planning about purpose and audience is an important component in report writing.

4.4 EVALUATION OF STUDENTS' REPORTS

This section presents results of the gatekeepers' evaluation of the students' reports. It will address research question 2: Do students' report measure up to those criteria of an 'acceptable' report? If not, why?

In obtaining the information on students' performance in the reports, both gatekeepers were asked to read the reports, evaluate them and make a holistic judgement as to whether the reports are 'acceptable' by their standards, using a holistic six-point scale (see Research Instruments). In making this decision, they were asked to consider the criteria each of them had set forth earlier, listed out in the 'Acceptability' Criteria Rating List. The results will be discussed below.

4.4.1 Reports Evaluation

Gatekeeper 1 (GK 1) : Senior Manager, Marketing

Gatekeeper 1 (GK 1) evaluated a total of five Marketing reports. Results show that all five of the students' reports did not measure up to the criteria of an 'acceptable' report set forth by GK 1. Table 9 shows the results of GK 1's holistic judgement on the reports.

Table 9: Results of GK 1's Evaluation of Reports

Group/ Faculty/ Year	Title of Report	Grade					
		6	5	4	3	2	1
1. Group 1 – FPP/3	A Report on Direction of the Internet in Business Environment						/
2. Group 5 – FPP/3	Report on Internet in terms of Managing the Business Environment					/	
3. Group 8 – FPP/3	The Past, Present and Future Methods of Collaboration and Communication						/
4. Group 7 – FE/ 2	A Report on Online Sevice in Malaysia						/
5. Group 10 – FE/3	Market Research on Financially Related Product – MYOB Software				/		

As can be seen, three reports were given the lowest rating in this study, which shows that they were clearly not acceptable, and were far below the standards expected of an analytical report. One report, written by group 5 was given a score of '2', which indicates that it was not acceptable and cannot be relied on for organisational decision making or support. Lastly, the market research report on MYOB Software written by group 10 received a score of '3' meaning that it was possibly not acceptable for organisational use (see Research Instruments for descriptors).

The findings obtained thus far on students' written performance are consistent with findings of other studies on graduates' poor written communication skills. (Nurahimah, 1994 as cited in Azlina, 1998; Leong, 1998). Both Nurahimah's and Leong's studies revealed graduates' inability to write well on the job judging from employers' dissatisfaction over many written products. Elsewhere, employers'

perception on the quality of recent college graduates writing was also unfavourable. Anderson (in Odell and Goswami, 1985) found in a survey of 38 accounting companies that on the average, 70 percent of the respondents gave the new accountants the lowest rating for six kinds of communication including reports and memos. These three studies imply the need to investigate upon these deficiencies in writing by focusing on the specifics, that is, the actual features or skills that are lacking with those that are expected in order to educate future graduates on the rules of written communication employers go by in the workplace.

In the discussions that follow, reasons why the students' reports in this study failed to meet the requirements and expectations of a report will be detailed by drawing upon responses in Questionnaire II/ Editorial Worksheet and the post interview. The overall framework of analysis will be based on the procedure used by researchers like Odell and Goswami in 1982 (in Odell & Goswami, 1985) in examining written texts and interviewing respondents for judgements about choices of content in written documents (1985: 54). Here, the procedure will be adapted to study students' reports and obtain the gatekeepers' judgements on the reports as well as justifications for rejecting them.

The researcher also made a point to study the reports as well. However, her evaluation of the reports will not be included in the discussion as part of the findings. It will be included only to throw light onto or clarify areas of ambiguity in the gatekeepers' responses with regard to the reports.

4.4.1.1 Report 1 : A Report on Direction of the Internet in Business Environment

Group 1 FPP/3

This report was clearly found to be unacceptable, therefore did not measure up to the the criteria of an 'acceptable' report. GK 1's justifications for rejecting the report appear to be based on the following aspects:

- Report was confusing to read largely due to incoherent organization of points
- Content that was considerably inaccurate and incomplete
- Poor sentence structure and wrong word choice
- Plagiarism

In terms of Organization, one of the general comments made concerning the points in the report was that they 'are scattered all over the report', making it difficult for GK 1 to follow the discussion, let alone understand the message conveyed. Short phrases such as 'there's no relation', 'I have no clue what he's trying to tell me', as well as a simple yet criticizing 'huh?' can be found at many places in the report where there were missing connections between points, between paragraphs and between sections. For example, three paragraphs in the Introduction and Findings were problematic in terms of coherence due to missing links between the sentences, between one paragraph to another and in between sections. Added on to the problem

was the use of short and choppy sentences. (Parts in italics show texts that have been quoted from the report):

(From Introduction) *The business environment is getting the world's attention* – “What business environment is he talking about? It's too general.” *It is important to study the pattern of Internet usage in business-* “This sentence has no relation to the sentence preceding it. What is he trying to say? That's a part of the background. It is really starting abrupt.

(From Findings: Marketing through Internet) *Business has cost anxiety among sales person because of the popular images that arising now. Only those talented people succeed in E-business* – “This part seems to be hanging. What anxiety are you referring to? What do you mean by talented?...This part the grammar is also wrong.”

(From Findings) *What makes Dell a great online player is its ability.... Yet Dell and its customers know that nothing beats the web for taking care of the annoying stuff-* “huh?” *About \$5 million of Dell PCs are ordered this way everyday.*” Again there's no relation....I don't know what he's saying here....plus I don't know why he chose Dell. Out of the blue, you know...Dell.”

The same problem also appeared in the Conclusion section where, according to GK1, there was little connection made between the findings and the conclusions. To add to that, he also found some contradictory statements and facts which made little sense to the topic. In addition to organization problems, problems of inaccurate and wrong content also caught GK 1's attention. For instance, the example on Dell given earlier on in the report was not a correct choice of company as an example. This is because comparatively, other companies like Cisco makes 45 million a year, therefore, would have been a better choice of an example. GK 1 felt that the information was outdated, and found that students had ample time (the two months they had to write the report) to find out. Another one was an example on ‘Bill Gates, LEO’ (note what was assumed as a typographical error on the term ‘CEO’). GK 1

stated that Gates is not a CEO, and that students should have checked their sources. GK 1's responses to these two examples imply that students are expected to have information search skills to be able to provide useful information in the report.

Some of the information in the content was also found to be vague and lacking in applicability. For example, one of the findings claimed that Microsoft had made 'nice gains' with more than twenty million visitors in March 1999. GK 1 wondered what 'nice gains' meant and whether the information on the number of visitors referred to a Malaysian site. At another point in the report, a paragraph on features and benefits of networking through the internet led GK 1 to enquire whether any Malaysian examples could be given to provide some purpose to the whole paragraph. It is clear here that GK expects some degree of application of facts to actual situations. Vague content on the other hand, was pointed out at an example given in the report, that is on an e-commerce website, Amazon.com, with details of its special features along with the following concluding statement:

(On page 2: Findings) All this helps explain why Amazon.com is not losing customer to its competition.....Amazon is good that customers have little incentive to go through the trouble of signing up elsewhere.

GK 1 felt that more explanation was needed to substantiate the details on features of the website to sufficiently explain why Amazon could retain its customers. The rule was that 'one should not assume the reader understands what one is trying to say'. With reference to one of his criteria on maximum analyses of points in a report, this

argument can be referred to his earlier comment that one 'should educate the reader, assuming that the reader knows next to nothing about the topic'.

In terms of language use, the problems appeared to be poor sentence structure or sentence pattern, grammar, and most prominently, wrong word choice. GK 1's annotations on language mistakes include circling the word or phrase and sometimes correcting it, and indicating what the mistake was next to the relevant paragraph/part. Some of the mistakes are as follows:

- The Premier Pages **cut** Dell's costs by minimizing orders and **they free** its people....
- Simply put, of a sales rep is not bogged down chasing purchase order taxes, they will have more time for talking face to face with customers.
- Functions of networking through internet **become** a major successful factor towards..
- There are **few** examples....(in referring to a few examples given)
- Business has caused anxiety.....because of the popular images **arising** now.

In addition, a preference for simple language still stands, as illustrated in the interview excerpt below. (The parts in italics refer to texts from the report):

(reads a sentence) " *Amazon.com founded in 1994....famous for its happy customers, its burgeoing sales* – Hah? Why not use 'high sales'? Simple words....Spelling too is wrong....."

GK 1's preference for simple words can also be seen in one of the paragraphs where he had circled the word 'gleans' from the sentence '*everyone knows that Amazon uses the data it gleans to make buying recommendation for its customers*', and the word 'Vanguard' from the sentence '*business survival depends on being in the Vanguard of new technology*.' Here, GK 1 specifically circled the word and wrote 'use simple words' next to it. He also made reference to the magazine *Business 2.0*, and his idea put forth earlier on using an intertext to place the definition of the word (see pre-interview data) which may be foreign to readers.

Problems in word choice appear to be very prominent, judging from GK 1's comments in the report and the interview. He specifically made a reference to problems in using the Thesaurus in the Net when talking about word choice. He felt that the students might have used the Thesaurus but failed to use the word in its appropriate context, even to the extent of not knowing the meaning of the word itself. One example has been provided below to illustrate this point:

".....this one is 'de facto' not '*the facto*'. You see, they're trying to use big words but not sure how to use it. After this I didn't read anymore because I think they plagiarised."

Perhaps, one serious problem in the report is plagiarism. GK 1 finds plagiarism illegal and unethical so whenever he saw evidence of this in the report, he either marked the whole paragraph and stated his point of view or skipped the relevant pages. Although the interview could not illustrate his tone of voice, it can be said

that it was frustrating for him to see plagiarism in the report. One of the consequences of plagiarism in a report is ineffective conclusions and recommendation. To GK 1, conclusions and recommendations are important parts of the report, and using the opinion of others only weakens the conclusions and recommendations put forth. His argument on this is illustrated in his comment that 'a proposal forces the writer to provide his or her own views and opinions. There is no value in providing third party opinion.' This is a clear indication that the report had failed to achieve its objective, and thus was of little use for organisational purposes.

4.4.1.2 Report 2 : Report on the Internet in terms of Managing the Business
Environment
Group 5 FPP/3

This report was found to be unacceptable, thus cannot be relied on for organisational decision making. Most comments were evaluative of the content of the report as well as language due to the number of indications made in the report with regard to language errors. The following are features of the report based on GK 1's responses:

- Incomplete and inaccurate content. Ineffective conclusions and recommendations
- Lacked a good flow of ideas. Little connection between points

- No evidence of thinking skills and information skills necessary for effective argument of points
- Excessive mistakes in grammar, some in sentence structure and word forms

Like Report 1, GK 1 made comments on the inaccuracy of the data. He was not pleased to see that in one of the findings on communication via the internet, Electronic Stock Trading was given as an example. He also expected more recent results from the first and second quarter of 1999 because other companies like Etrade has been in existence since 1998 and has been 'doing great'. Again, his side comments in the report asked that the students check their resources, implying his expectation on students' thinking ability and their information search skills. To him it was evident from the writing that the students accepted whatever they read without thinking. The following excerpt from the interview illustrates this viewpoint:

" They accepted too quickly. They're not thinking. If they could get 1998 data, okay enough. Now is already the third quarter of the year. They should have the data. And you know if they take (figures) from real source, company like Etrade is doing great so these figures do not tally with what I know...I'm not sure where they got that from."

On another finding to do with how the internet can help manage the business environment in terms of costs, courier services was quoted as being inefficient in transferring information. GK 1 felt that this was untrue because companies like UPS and Federal Express provide 'great, secure and fast' services and are doing great. There were some other comments on Content which referred to common business sense. This can be seen in GK 1's response to a statement in the report on

maintaining competitive advantage in business. It was written in the report that *'many companies tried to find an existing practices that can help them improve their activities.'* GK 1 felt that this was also untrue because companies need to look into the future to be more competitive in order to survive longer.

In terms of Language, GK 1 saw that the report contained many language errors, including grammar errors like missing and wrong articles and wrong tenses such as below:

- companies tried to find **an** existing practices...
- having **a** most up to date information
- They have a computer and access to internet but **did** not use the facilities..

Some errors were on sentence structure and word forms, where GK 1 circled and put comments such as 'hanging', 'this sentence makes no sense' and 'huh?' Some examples have been listed below:

- However, these thing is not always easy. For example, for new product or services development that involves a careful market analysis, product marketing and consumer based testing.
- Internet is the extensively use for exchanging information.....
- Having a most up to date information about market....allows to keep increase on competitive edge.
- It takes a long time and highly cost for us...

Lastly, the report lacked a good flow of ideas. This was most evident at places such as in the Introduction, between the Introduction and the Findings section and between Findings and the Conclusion sections. GK 1 had this to say concerning the flow of ideas between the introduction and the findings:

“Out of the blue they wrote findings. What are they doing a research on? They have not given me any indication of what the report is all about. To have findings, you need a reason to investigate. What are you investigating?”

GK 1's comment above was made in the light of an absence of a purpose statement of any kind in the introduction that clearly stated the purpose of the report. Therefore, he found difficulties following the discussion because of how the points had been poorly connected. His feedback on this was in tandem with his earlier stand on the importance of a good, clear introduction which provides a good overview of the report. The conclusions were found to be repetitive of the findings and some did not relate to the findings at all. In addition, the recommendations were not found to be helpful, especially so when they were reiteration of words from other sources.

4.4.1.3 Report 3 : The Past, Present and Future Methods of Collaboration and Communication.

Group 8 FPP/3

This report was found to be clearly unacceptable in that it fell far below the standards expected of an analytical report. GK came to this decision based on the following justifications :

- Information contained in the report was largely irrelevant to the topic
- The points provided carried little weight and served very little purpose in addressing the topic. This also applied to the conclusions and recommendations
- There were problems of coherence and unity between points
- Plagiarism

The report on the whole did not address the topic, even from the start. It was felt that the introduction did not provide GK 1 with a clear idea on what the report was all about. The following is GK 1's written comment on the Introduction section:

Table 10: GK 1's Written Comments

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The introduction does not provide me with any information about the paper. It also does not relate to the topic or subject of the paper. For e.g.<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. What has telecommunication got to do with the topic?b. How is marketing involved in this?c. With this type of intro. I am not compelled to read on |
|---|

Firstly, it can be seen that GK 1's opinion on the introduction of the report was quite negative because of its inadequacy in giving a good overview of the report as well as in capturing his interest to read on. Secondly, the introduction contained information that had little connection to the topic. The findings of the report too had the same problem of relevance. GK 1 found that many of the points carried little weight especially when most were mere definitions and terms of marketing strategies. What he expected was a comparison paper which provided details on the 'new' possible ways of communicating and how they could be achieved and implemented.

The report was made more unacceptable by ineffective conclusions and recommendations. GK 1 skipped the whole of the Conclusion section because the conclusions did not relate to the findings. The recommendations provided, on the other hand, seemed somewhat loose and general with little information to go by. The following excerpt from the interview contains his opinion on the recommendations:

(picks on a recommendation) *Management should provide good service.*
"Define good service. I think I have good service! What do you mean by this? How do you measure? If it was bad before, I cannot say that I think it's bad. Like this one – Lost Customer Analysis – what is Lost Customer Analysis and what will it do for me? They (the students) just tell me what it is. If this is a good tool to use, okay, so how do I do it?"

The report also had problems with coherence and unity, as evident from GK 1's use of phrases such as 'no relation' written in the report. His reason for doing this could

be due to his confusion over several disunified paragraphs in the report. GK 1 pointed out an example from the report which showed this particular problem on coherence and unity between two paragraphs. This particular example can be found on page 2 of the Findings section which dealt with the topic on previous communication in marketing. According to GK 1, the paragraph dealing with the history of the telephone lines did not relate at all with the paragraph following it which talked about a renewed emphasis on global quality movement, citing TQM, with specific reference to Japanese firms as examples. The problem with this is that both paragraphs were preceded with the same brief, three liner definition as an introductory sentence that had no connection with the subheading:

“ He has not relate, you know...not that they haven't relate from paragraph to paragraph (but) to what the're saying here (to the topic on Products). So the train of thought is not there.”

Another weakness in the report is its ineffective use and presentation of visuals. GK 1 found that the diagrams included in the report were not explained nor supported by any kind of write up. His dissatisfaction with this has to do with his belief that diagrams/visuals must explain a point because if he had to decipher everything, then they were of no value to the report (refer criteria on reports; section 4.3.1.5). In terms of Language, it was difficult to gauge the language errors made because very few were pointed out. Looking at the report, though, it is quite understandable that these errors were non-existent because most texts were plagiarised from an external source. Nonetheless, some of the language errors detected by GK 1 are as follows:

- Marketers were carefully monitor the pricing and quality of.....all products.
- They choosed the price that produced maximum current profit, cash flow
- As more toward from past, marketing strategies are facing some new marketing communication realities.

All in all, this report was rated very low because according to GK 1, it did not provide much use to the reader. It was expressed in the interview that although the report shows that the writers/students knew all the traditional means of marketing, a Marketing Manager wants to explore something new to make his marketing strategy better. The writers/students gave him some information on this in their report but there was no indication of how the new technology could help. His comments written at the end of the report best summarise his overall opinion on the report:

Table 11: GK 1's Overall Opinion on Report 3

1. Your paper has touched extensively on definitions and terms. What you are missing is the entire topic at hand.
2. Your points in your paper is also staggered and non-related. What's the point of providing an issue and not extending it.
3. Always ask yourself after writing a point "so what?" Then try answering them. Is your message clear?
4. What are you trying to convey in your paper?

4.4.1.4 Report 4 : A report on Online Service in Malaysia

Group 7 FE/2

This report was clearly unacceptable to GK 1 based on the following reasons:

- Wrong content. Irrelevant points. Reflects someone who has no background knowledge on the topic
- Little connection between points therefore confusing to read
- Rampant plagiarism

It was expressed in the interview that GK 1 took this particular report in a more sensitive way because the writers chose to talk about Fishnet which is an online system his company produced. The report had a very short Executive Summary but it was not an effective one as there was actually nothing to go by. In terms of Content, GK 1 could see that the content was totally irrelevant and wrong from the very beginning. The report started out with a description of Product Life Cycle (PLC) which had nothing to do with Fishnet, therefore, GK 1 skipped the next four pages on PLC. He also said that all the information had been plagiarised. The Introduction, to say the least, did not appeal to GK 1 as expected.

On what he expected in the content, GK 1 felt that at its simplest, the students should have explained what a Fishnet is and what its services are so the readers will know that it is a financially related service. The 'Findings' reflect even poorer content, in

that all the information given were either irrelevant to Fishnet or were wrong facts about Fishnet, leaving GK 1 somewhat confused. There was also little connection between the introduction and the first 'finding'. The following interview data best illustrate this situation:

(on page 5: Findings) "...and then suddenly...Findings on online in Malaysia -point 2.1.1 Accelerent. I thought you were writing on Fishnet? I think Accelerent is a company....when I read this I think it's a company, you know...the point on rental agreements and all. But then I thought about Fishnet - what is this ?!"

"...Like this point - point 2.2.2...Secure Server Online Commerce Services. There's no such things in Fishnet in all these. So lots of things are rubbish. This term Fishcart - this is my best betlah - this is shopping cart SQL. He got it from some website...If you ask him what is SQL, he won't know. After this I know everything is irrelevant so I skipped.

Another example is when the students assumed that Fishnet provided online transactions when in actual fact the company has never publicized this fact. Fishnet only provides Contents, therefore the facts in the report were inaccurate. GK 1 felt that such mistakes were caused by excessive copying. He does not appear to tolerate plagiarism thus skipped many pages where there is evidence of such crime. He expressed his objections in the interview as below:

"I don't need all this. I can read it myself....If you read all this..everything has been copied - rubbish! They...actually waited a week before....at least the other three (reports) had bibliography - just goes to show. If you give this to an MD of this financial online company, he will just throw it away. So it's wasted whatever two months that you had (to produce the report)".

In talking about the content of the report, GK 1 expected better from second year students, especially when there is actually enough information around to help them write. In this sense, the students should have gone and found out because Fishnet has its own website. On the question whether he expected an Economics students to know about this, GK 1 had this to say:

“ They are business students. It’s a business paper. What’s the topic again?
Ah! I expect more especially if you’re a final year student.”

In terms of Language, GK 1 stated that there was not much he could comment on because everything had been plagiarised. Therefore his comments mainly referred to the content and organization of the report.

4.4.1.5 Report 5 : Market research on Financially-related Product – MYOB
Software
Group 10 FE/3

This particular report received the highest rating of all the reports although it was still unacceptable to GK 1. In general, GK 1 found the report to be well-written as far as language and organization were concerned but was of limited applicability to the online service industry.

To start with, GK 1 was pleased to see some clarity and purpose in the student’s writing. There was a good introduction which stated the purpose of the report, what

the methods of obtaining information were, as well as some background information on MYOB. There was also a good flow of ideas, a feature which GK 1 was pleased to see in comparison with other reports. Due to these positive features, GK made very few comments in the report, except for check marks at some points to show approval.

The main problem with the report was that it contained information that was lacking in applicability to the online service industry. Firstly, MYOB itself is an accounting software and not a finance related product. Secondly, the report contained little analyses of facts to evaluate MYOB in terms of how it could benefit the industry/company. The following excerpt from the interview illustrates GK 1's opinion on the report:

“ By reading all these, I know what MYOB is. Now the sad thing is at the end of the day – so what? You want me to buy the product? What are you trying to tell me? This is one report I think that has the flow, it has the right content, it explains a lot but so? What does it do for me?.....I don't know why they chose accounting software or why MYOB but I put that aside.”

“ Here they have the recommendations, which is good. They're more to advantages of using the product. But tell me how the company can benefit from this.”

4.4.2 Reports Evaluation

Gatekeeper 2 : Senior Manager, Administration

GK 2 evaluated a total of four reports. Of the four reports, only one report measured up to the criteria of an ‘acceptable’ analytical report set forth earlier. Table 12 shows the results of GK 2’s holistic evaluation of the reports:

Table 12: Results of GK 2's Evaluation of Reports

Group/ Faculty/ Year	Title of Report	Grade					
		6	5	4	3	2	1
1. Group 2 – FE/3	Dead-end Crisis: Long Life Insurance			/			
2. Group 9 – FPP/3	Report on the Necessity of having a Formal Salary Structure.					/	
3. Group 4 – FE/ 2	ISO 9000 Certification Process in Malaysia and How it can be Applied to Financial related Company.						/
4. Group 6 – FE/ 3	A Report on The Enhancement of Quality System and its Importance to the Industry						/

As can be seen, Report 1 on the dead-end crisis faced by Long Life Insurance was found to be acceptable by GK 2, meaning that it was functional for the designated audience. Report 2 on salary policy received a score of ‘3’ which means that it was ‘possibly not acceptable’. Both reports 3 and 4 on the ISO certification process and on Quality System respectively received the lowest score of ‘1’, which means that they fell far below the standards expected of an analytical report, and thus were found to be clearly unacceptable. The reasons behind GK 2’s decisions on the reports will be discussed below.

4.4.2.1 Report 1 : Dead-end Crisis in Long Life Insurance

Group 2 FE/2

This report was the only report found to be acceptable earning a score of '4'. However, the interview conducted with GK 2 revealed that the report was 'acceptable' but required some improvements due to the following inadequacies:

- The content was focused but lacking in application
- There were rather weak conclusions and recommendations
- Very little plagiarism could be detected. There were good efforts in using own words to write the report. Problems in sentence structure, expressions, grammar and spelling were, however, clearly noticeable
- There was ineffective use of visuals

In terms of the content of the report, GK 2 found it to be focused, therefore the topic was addressed rather well. For GK 2, this showed that the student understood the concept of 'dead-end' crisis in a job situation. However, it was written in the Editorial Worksheet that there was some repetition of points, judging from the 'excessive use of the word dead-end'. It was not clear at first what exactly was meant by this. However, her explanation in the interview revealed that the repetitions were not totally content related but more so a language related problem.

According to GK 2, the problem could be sentence structure and the way the writers/students expressed themselves.

Although focused, the content was seen to be lacking in application. This comment was made with specific reference to the recommendations. It was stated that many of the recommendations were theoretical and might not be very workable. GK 2 gave an example in the report where the recommendation to minimise 'dead-end' problems was to create more positions by opening another branch elsewhere. GK 2 felt that this would not be totally feasible because to her, opening a branch is not as simple as it seems. It was expressed in the interview that this particular example indicated that the students did not think through the recommendation carefully enough to decide whether it was workable or feasible. The root of the problem, according to GK 2 is that the students took these facts from textbooks without considering how the recommendation might be applied in the appropriate context. The following interview data contains the gist of the argument above:

" Okay. Theories can provide ten ways of providing a solution but are they workable? Like here they said, create more positions. I think this is not feasible. (reads from text)- *There are several positions that can be created for efficiency purposes.* – you know, in creating more levels like this, you will make things worse."

The feedback given on the recommendation indicates her concern for a good strong/workable recommendation which is capable of giving the report some substance. Some of the ways in which this could be achieved are by elaborating and

expanding upon the recommendations. To her, being able to apply ideas to the actual situation at hand is more important than providing theories or general information and facts because in the end, readers want to know how certain ideas, strategies, and policies can benefit the company. The readers want to know what exactly should be done, which steps to take and what procedures to follow.

In addition to all this, GK 2 was also not very pleased with the conclusion of the report because she saw it to be a mere summary of the findings. It can be said that from her responses on the content, the report only managed to fulfil the 'minimum' requirement of an analytical report. Perhaps going over and beyond what was provided in the report could earn it a better score than a '4'.

In terms of Language, GK 2 was pleased to see that there was very little evidence of plagiarism, and that the students had made the effort to use their own words in writing. Nonetheless, there were problems with sentence structure and expressions which affected the content. However, she marked only very few errors although some major errors like sentence structure, grammar and word choice were clearly evident in the report. Some of the ones which GK 2 highlighted are as follows:

- Human resource department **has a desire** to evaluate the organization.
- In administration department, staff is moving slow and leads to **many piles work**.
- Strictly specialization make worker feels **less pride of** accomplishment.

- Therefore, further step will be taken to ensure this problems **been solves**.

In relation to the topic on Language, GK 2 indicated that she was very sensitive to errors and believed that one should pay particular attention to language use as it could affect the content. Her comment here is reflective of her comments earlier on the importance of language as a form of communication.

One other problem to do with the report is ineffective use of visuals. GK 2 found that firstly, some of the information in the report should have been transferred into a table format so that they be better presented. Her comment was made in reference to one of the findings which consisted of several statistics explained in a rather long winded manner. GK 2 felt that putting the numbers in a table would make things clearer. Secondly, the positioning of some of the tables had to be changed. She found that one of the tables was placed at the back (in the Appendix) without any reference made to it or explanation provided on its relevance to the topic. This did not help the readers in any way because they would have to search for the information themselves.

4.4.2.2 Report 2 : A report on the Necessity of Having a Formal Salary
Structure
Group 9 FPP/3

GK 2 found this report to be unacceptable for organisational use. Her justifications for rejecting it were as follows:

- Too general content. Did not address the report topic.
- Rampant plagiarism

GK 2 reacted quite negatively to the report. Her first reaction was one of frustration because according to her, the whole report seemed plagiarised. Since all the information included in the report had been taken from another source (without changes made to the language used), GK 2 found that the report was of little use to her. In response to a question on the necessity of using books or documents as reference in devising a salary policy, she said that it was possible to come up with your own policy, using these sources as guidelines. The following interview data best illustrates her initial reaction to the report:

“ Well, it’s not an exam question, you know. You don’t have a salary policy, right. So you have to recommend some things. I expect you to go out and do some research, read some books, come back and summarise. But like here, I ended up reading the books! I’m reading a book. You see that’s the problem. All this...copy!

Plagiarism aside, GK 2 felt that the report was unacceptable because the content was too general and contained repetitions of points. At its simplest, a summary of the whole thing would suffice. The problem was that the students did not analyse the situation so they were not able to provide information that was appropriate to the context. Most of the information was believed to have been taken from other sources, and presented as it was in the report without considering its applicability. The interview data below illustrates this argument:

“ Okay, recommendations (reads the first two sentences)-*Technically based jobs such as technicians, machine operators and engineers the more skill they have the higher the wage should be* –Isn’t this the way life goes? This one..(reads another part)- *Company should give 5% of the company’s profit to employees in order to stimulate productivity and better achievement in future*- Feasible? What proof? There are so many things I can ask. 5% is a lot you know from the company’s profit. And for a company with 100 employees....that’s a lot.”

In addition to the students’ inability to apply theory to practice, the recommendations were weak because they did not indicate exactly the course of action one should take. In terms of the salary structure and policy, the recommendations in the report did not indicate what steps to take or which policy to adopt. All in all, the report had failed to meet its objectives, and thus was found to be unacceptable for organisational use. No feedback on Language or Organization was given.

4.4.2.3 Report 3 : ISO 9000 Certification Process in Malaysia and How It Is
Applied to Financial Related Company
Group 4 FE / 2

This report received the lowest rating because it fell far below the standards of an analytical report. GK 2 found the report unacceptable based on the following reasons:

- Weak content. Irrelevant details . Did not address the issue in question
- Incoherent and repetitive
- Rampant plagiarism

The report was seen to have a very weak content which did not address the topic even from the start. In addition to being 'textbook like', no details were given on or reference made to how ISO 9000 could be applied to finance related companies. To add to that, there was also no statement of any kind that clearly told readers the gist or simply the purpose of the investigation/report. The findings, on the other hand, contained details which were very irrelevant to the topic, indicating to GK 2 that the students did not have much knowledge of the subject. As an example, some information on the history of ISO 9000 was provided in the Background. It was stated there that 'ISO was not limited to any particular branch but covers all technical fields except electrical and engineering'. According to GK 2, information such as this can be found in many ISO documents, which by themselves are

concerned with the technical fields. In this case, the students, as writers, should have been able to recognize this and find means to relate ISO 9000 to the service industries. This could be as simple as acknowledging that even if ISO concerns the engineering field, it can be applied to a finance related service company.

Some other details provided in the report were noticeably more irrelevant than the above. These can be found in the findings on page 2 of the report. They include information on the format of the credit cards, smart card, technicalities such as an optimal thickness of cards and others such as speed code, photographic equipment and all which GK 2 found to be 'rubbish'. To add to this problem, GK 2 stated that no one reference was made to the topic or to the question on how any of these paraphernalia could be applied to finance related companies. In summary, the report did not address the issue in question directly. The comments below show what GK 2 expected from the report:

(on findings : point 2.1.3. why is international standardization needed)

"Fine. Why is it needed..(reads a sentence)- *international standardization is well established for many technologies in diverse field* – Aah? I want to know whether I can do it or not! Okay...my main concern is I want to get certified, right. Basically what I'm looking for is...just define which they did...but they did too much copying. How many levels in Malaysia and what is it called in Malaysia. It's not ISO 9000. Okay say there's four – 9001, 9002, 9003, 9004 - briefly describe each one and tell me which I should take and why."

In addition to the above problem, there was evidence of plagiarism. For example, pages 6-9 contained information that was mostly plagiarised, which according to GK 2, can be found in her notes. There was also some repetition of points which GK 2

found frustrating. She felt that the students had problems in understanding the topic/subject of the report rather than problems in organization of points.

On the topic of Organization, the report was seen to have some coherence and unity problems. The students appeared to have taken bits of information and put those together. GK 2's response indicated that it was not done effectively enough. Again, like Report 2, no comments could be made on the language used because mostly everything was plagiarised. In fact, her Editorial Worksheet contained only one comment on the report ; that it was a 'total copy of the book'. It is a clear indication of her stand on plagiarism. In terms of Presentation, GK 2 found the report to be 'boring' as it made use of 'Times Roman'. This kind of expectation goes back to the idea of having some creativity in writing as well as taking the initiative to present the report in a 'nicer' way than usual.

4.4.2.4 Report 4 : A Report on the Enhancement of Quality System and its Importance to the Industry.
Group 6

GK 2 found this report to be totally unacceptable, which means that it fell far below the expectation of an analytical report. Her decision appears to be based on the following reasons:

- The content lacked focus, thus failed to address the actual issue in question

- The report lacked application to the actual context of the service industry
- There were loose, underdeveloped parts. Many vague generalities
- The language used was not concise and was lacking in simplicity
- There was evidence of plagiarism

Before moving on to the discussion on the above, it needs to be mentioned here that the report only looked at the first part of the topic provided, that is on the Quality System and its usefulness and purposes in an organisation. The second part which required the students to write on the five structures of a quality manual together with examples of an industry each (refer topics) was not attempted due to problems in obtaining access to confidential documents on quality manuals.

In terms of the content of the report, GK 2 stated that it contained all the right facts about Quality System. However, she found that the report failed to address the issue in question/topic because there was little application made to the context of the service industries. In other words, the report itself was very theoretical and was not application oriented enough for it to be of considerable use (the one essential characteristic of an analytical report). In relation to her criteria on Content in an analytical report, this report fell short because its content was not focused, therefore, did not meet the objective.

In addition to the above, some parts of the report were found to contain vague generalities as well as some underdeveloped parts which did not help much in

addressing the topic. GK 2's assumption was that the students did not understand what Quality System was all about, as illustrated by her comments in the interview below:

(from text) Many...that are using quality system saw the quality system theof all ills which saves money and improves everything. The reality is far from true – “ So...how do you know that? Why? Substantiate your claims lah. Like this one - many companies boast having a certified quality system but did not realize that their company does not improve...Are the quality system to blame?- “Tell me please.”

GK 2 added that the students went on and on about such generalizations on the Quality System giving her nothing to go by. All the students had to do was to briefly describe and explain Quality System and its five structures before moving on to tell her how all that can be applied to the service industry.

In reponse to the students' problems in securing the information needed to write the report, she understood that some documents on Quality System as well as quality manuals were confidential. However, it was unnecessary for the students to go through all the problems if they had understood what was required (that is of the topic). On that note, it is perhaps worth commenting on the students' point of view concerning the topic given to them. A member of the group expressed in the student interview that they had problems with the topic because they were not clear on what was expected, and that the second part on including the five structures of a quality manual was too broad to cover. GK 2 had the following to say:

“ If they go and ask ‘Can I have the quality manual of...(a company)?’ – of course they (the people) will say no. It’s confidential. They (the students) did not understand. I did not ask for examples. I asked how it can be applied to us.”

Perhaps the tension which existed between the two parties in terms of the requirements of the topic may be attributable to certain ambiguities inherent in the topic itself. Firstly, there was actually no explicit mention that one had to relate the findings to the service industry, thus students understood it to be a report which asked for information on Quality System. Secondly, despite GK 2’s justification that she never asked for examples (refer interview excerpt above), the question itself contained a statement which required ‘an example of an industry each’ to be given. This could have misled the students into thinking that they had to access information on the quality manual of a specific company in order to answer the question.

Whatever the reasons for not performing up to standards might be, it can be seen here that GK 2 had high expectations of the students. This includes being able to make connections between the topic and the service industry, even when not told specifically to do so. This can be seen in one of her comments that, problems aside, the report should still have some element of applicability to the real world context:

“ ...I did not ask for examples. I asked how it can be applied. Even if I asked for it (example), I still want to know how a company’s way of doing things can be applied to us. How did the company achieve it (certification) for example. Another thing, giving examples of a company (referring to examples of companies given in the report) is like a case study. I did not ask for a case study. If it was a case study, I want to see just one (company) and that one they really have to tell me everything”.

The expectation on students to be able to reason out a topic/ writing assignment also applied to the students' writing Report 2 on Salary Structure, in that they were expected to go out, do some research, come back, summarise the facts and form a workable solution. Whether or not the students were able to find a way out themselves is questionable, but the way the topics were assigned may be the way writing assignments are assigned in the workplace. Students should perhaps learn to consider such rigorous structure of workplace writing than the more simplified and 'safer' writing assignments they are used to in the classroom.

In terms of Language, GK 2's comment indicated that the report lacked conciseness. It was reported that the descriptions on many aspects of Quality System and quality manuals were long when they could have been condensed into point forms. GK 2 believed this could be because all the information was copied from an ISO document. Again, the topic on plagiarism drew a frustrated tone in her voice. In referring to her criteria on the use of simple language, GK 2 found that the language in the report should be simpler. Since the report contained words and phrases taken from other sources, the 'document like' language could not be taken as simple language.

In summary, this section looked at the gatekeepers' evaluation of the students' reports in detail. It was found that the students had failed to write an analytical report which could measure up to the criteria set forth for one. Almost all of the

reports were found to be unacceptable. Only one report was found to be acceptable but at a minimum level expected of a good analytical report. Most of the problems found in the reports were associated with content and organization. Problems with language were rather difficult to detect because the students plagiarised from sources. However, those errors that could be detected comprised quite major ones such as sentence structure, grammar and word choice and formation. It can be said that many aspects of the reports need to be improved in making the report more acceptable to the gatekeepers.

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Section 4.5 of this chapter will present the gatekeepers', course instructor's and the students' opinions on how to make the reports more acceptable to the intended audience. All the responses were gathered from the post interviews conducted with the gatekeepers, course instructor and students. With the gatekeepers, some recommendations had been taken from their comments in the reports and in the Editorial Worksheets. The expressions have not been changed. Some of the students' expressions, however, had to be slightly rephrased due to major grammatical and structural problems. The summary of the results are as follows:

4.5.1 Marketing Reports : Gatekeeper 1

Table 13: Recommendations for Improvement (Marketing reports)

No	Group	Gatekeeper (1)	Course Instructor	Student
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Little thought given to topic. Try to envision the bigger picture and detailing the specific topics down. - Ask yourself what are businessmen concerned with. Get the answer. - Consider putting your own viewpoints & opinions in the conclusions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Include more relevant content/details. - Conclusions are ineffective. Include own opinion. - Recommendations should be made more specific. Expand upon them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do more research on content so more details can be included. - Improve the language used. - Write reports individually
2	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You need to be more knowledgeable about your surroundings. There are magazines and news on the Net that can help you do this. - You could have used materials from other sources. Try absorbing the data and put it in your own words. - Explain and support your diagrams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide more supporting details as support to the discussion. Include more concrete/solid facts. - Corrections need to be made on sentence structures and grammar. - Give more specific recommendation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obtain more details about the topic (clarifications). - To look at Conclusions and Findings again to better connect them. - Correct sentence structures.

No	Group	Gatekeeper (1)	Course Instructor	Student
3	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your paper touched extensively on definitions and terms. It should be a comparison paper. Manager is more interested in the 'new' possible ways of communicating. - Be more consistent in the examples used. - Once an issue has been put forward, extend upon it. - Always ask yourself after 'so what?'. Then try answering. Check that your message is clear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide more up to date examples and recommendations - Expand upon your recommendations. - Don't be too dependent on textbooks. - Should apply knowledge to a given situation. Don't just give definition for e.g of the 4P's. Say how it can be applied to online service industry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do more research if there is ample time.
4	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Go and find out about Fishnet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clarify the topic and read up on it. - Give more emphasis to the analytical part of the report. - Language- don't plagiarise. - Write a completely new report! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Find more information, if there is time. - Find out more about online service industry. - Should learn to use own words in writing but only if understand the topic.
5	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tell me how the company can benefit from MYOB software – application. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand upon the recommendation. Tell 'readers' how it can be implemented. - Be consistent in the format used. 	<p>No interview data (students absent from the interview)</p>

Results show that many of the recommendations given by all three groups of respondents were on Content. This could be because the major problem with many of the reports had to do with this aspect of reports. Some similarities, therefore, in the recommendations can be seen especially with regard to obtaining more information/details on a particular topic. Recommendations such as the need to be knowledgeable about the field, the need to provide more details as support, to do more research on topics, to expand upon an issue, to expand upon the recommendations, to apply knowledge to a given situation and to find out more about online industry pointed to this overriding concern for content.

It has already been seen that GK 1 attaches more importance to Content in determining the 'acceptability' of a report so it is perhaps understandable why he placed greater emphasis on improving the contents of the students' reports. However, for teachers and students, the emphasis they placed on Content was quite unexpected. Topic selection could be one of the other reasons behind this concern. According to the course instructor and some of the students, there were some initial problems in starting due to confusion over the topics provided, thus awareness of these problems could have forced both instructor and students to pay particular attention to improving the content of the reports. In fact, a few of the students' comments for a better report include getting prior clarifications on the topic(s) before writing.

It would be interesting to note here, however, that GK 1 never saw the topics to be a problem for the students because he expected business students to know many of the aspects he asked for in the topics such as the Internet. In a similar assumption on students' capabilities, Rosenberg (1988) found that of three factors which determine the success or failure in his community based report assignment, the topic selection seems the least important. According to him 'able, motivated, well-balanced teams can take an even unpromising topic and produce an informative and interesting professional report' (1988: 11).

Another content-related matter is the writing of the conclusion and recommendation. Both GK 1 and the course instructor appear to be very concerned with these two elements of the report. Both respondents believed that the Conclusion and the Recommendation were two of the most important parts of the report. It can also be seen from the recommendations in Table 13 that both the course instructor and GK 1 agreed to the fact that the conclusion should contain the writer's own opinion (see Report 1). No feedback was obtained from the students on this.

Recommendations for Language were very few. This could be because much of the information in the reports had been plagiarised. Those which seemed original to GK 1 and the course instructor received recommendations for improving sentence structures and grammar. The students were also aware of their language problems but one or two of them stated that they did not know how to go about correcting the mistakes. Some of them also acknowledged the importance of putting things in their

own words but stated that unfamiliarity with the topics and time constraints had forced them to plagiarise.

Other recommendations included prewriting (see GK 1), more effective use of visuals by explaining and supporting visuals used, and lastly, and interestingly, a recommendation that students write the reports individually (see student; report 1). When probed, the student in question stated that each member of the group wrote only a particular part of the report. It seems that the way writing was done in the group did not allow her to spot mistakes in language, especially when there were time constraints. Her solution was for students to write the reports individually in order for them to be accountable for their own writing.

Not much feedback could be drawn from the students on ways to improve upon their reports. Many of them were quite passive during the interview. They were either unsure of their own mistakes/writing problems or felt that they were not in a position to recommend anything they were not qualified to do (this despite having them voice their opinion first, before being shown the report and the gatekeepers' comments). In addition, although the interviews were meant as group interviews, poor turnout forced the researcher to make some changes to the original plan. Therefore, any conclusions made concerning students' viewpoints on improvement are tentative and are limited to the group population of the students selected in the study.

4.5.2 Human Resource and Administration reports : Gatekeeper 2

Table 14 below lists out the recommendations given by GK 2, the course instructor and students on improving the reports. The same situation applies here where not all members in a group came for the interview. In addition, no teacher interview data could be obtained on three reports because the interview scheduled could not be carried out due to some unforeseen circumstances.

Table 14: Recommendations for Improvement (Human Resource reports)

No	Group	Gatekeeper (2)	Course Instructor	Student
1	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- When making recommendations, please make sure that the recommendation is a workable solution. Not all points recommended in the books are workable solutions because each company is unique. Please do feasibility reports. Most readers go straight to recommendations –they want solution.- Not bad. Good effort to write own report rather than copy from a reference book.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- No interview data-	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Believed thay had written a good report. Agreed with GK2's recommendations for improvement.

2	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Please do not provide only general information on the topic. Give more specific ones. - You totally did not answer questions. The questions requested answers on formal wage policy and not research work. How and why can a salary policy be implemented? - Provide specific recommendations. Elaborate and expand. Where are your solutions? 	- No interview data	- No interview data (students absent from interview)
3	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Totally missed the point. Relate how ISO 9000 certification process can be applied to a financial related industry. - Copied the whole thing from a book. Summarize the information. Explain briefly all ISO certification process and apply. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Include more details and more explanation. - Need to emphasize more on the second part of the question i.e. how ISO 9000 is applicable to a financial related company. - Recommendations too general. Should pinpoint what benefits there are for the company - Improve layout and correct paragraph indentation. Be consistent. 	- No interview data (students absent from the interview).

No	Group	Gatekeeper (2)	Course Instructor	Student
4	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Please study the question carefully. Any company who asked for a report expect a concise report with a recommendation. Please use the theory and apply to the real situation. - Organization okay. - Language – be more concise and make report simpler. Use point forms so readers can access the information easily. 	- No interview data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relevant topics should be considered. Students should find own topics e.g. no. of vehicles on campus/parking problems is simpler to recommend and are more relevant.

From the interview data obtained regarding the reports written on an area related to Human Resource, one can see that again, recommendations were geared towards improving the contents of the reports to make them more acceptable to the gatekeepers. Most of the reports were found to be too general and were not application oriented, therefore the reports did not meet the criteria of an analytical report. Some of the recommendations for improvement include suggestions for the students to make specific references to the context of the service industries, and to place more emphasis on the analytical aspect of the reports. Another was for students to carry out a more careful study of the question (subject of the report).

It is interesting to note the similarities between GK 2's and the course instructor's recommendations, especially for Report 3 on ISO 9000 certification process. The

course instructor reported that the group writing report 3 received a lot of guidance in writing their report but still produced one that fell short of expectations. Language wise, the reports appeared free from major mistakes, therefore, very few recommendations were given. However, all along during the interviews, both GK 2 and the course instructor were aware that the students had plagiarised considerably, indicating that their mastery of the language was in actual fact quite poor and possibly could not meet GK 2's expectations on good language use and expressions.

In summary, Section 3 discussed the results of the gatekeepers' evaluation of the reports. It was found that all of the reports, except one, failed to measure up to the criteria of an 'acceptable' analytical report. Many of the problems with the reports had to do with the contents whereby they lacked focus, contained irrelevant and inaccurate information and loose underdeveloped parts which were made worse by weak argument of points. This applied to all parts of the report, especially the Recommendation. In addition, most of the reports lacked applicability to the context of the online service industry. In sum, the contents were inadequate in effectively addressing the issues in question.

Organization was another major problem. Many of the reports lacked a good flow of ideas causing frequent difficulties for the gatekeepers in following the relationship of points/ideas. Language problems included poor sentence structure and grammar. However, very few were detected due to rampant plagiarism. This was found to be particularly disturbing for both gatekeepers. They were of the opinion that the

students should have made the attempt to use their own words when writing, and be knowledgeable enough, as business students, to write well on the given topics.

Section 4 reviewed the recommendations put forth by the gatekeepers, the course instructor and the students on ways to improve upon the reports. For both categories of reports (Marketing and Human Resource), the recommendations were mostly for improving the contents of the reports. Much emphasis was given to writing better conclusions and recommendations, indicating their importance in a business report.

4.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REPORT WRITING COMPONENT IN THE BUSINESS ENGLISH COURSE

This section outlines some implications that the findings obtained thus far have for the Report Writing component of the course. These implications have been drawn mainly from the findings obtained on the expectations of gatekeepers in a business organisation with regard to written reports. Relevant information obtained from the students' and teachers' post questionnaires and interviews on their general evaluation of the Report Writing component will also be included in the discussion.

Results show that the 'acceptability' of a written analytical report was judged according to basic writing skills such as conciseness and simplicity in language use, good grammar and spelling, good organization and word choice as well as the more specific report writing skills such as analysis of a reader's situation and needs and

the writing of good introductions, conclusions and recommendations. Results indicated also that the student subjects failed to produce a report that met with the above standard of writing expected of fresh graduates. These findings have several important implications for the Report Writing component in the English for Business course at UKM. The implications listed below have been organized according to the criteria or emphasis which seem to be the most important to the gatekeepers:

4.6.1 Approach and Methodology with regard to Contents

The findings of this study show that the success of a written report depends largely on a strong content. In terms of pedagogical concerns and course improvement, the following steps may help assist student writers produce better contents for reports:

1. There needs to be intensive practice to develop students' skills in writing the introduction, conclusions and recommendations of an analytical report. It can be seen from the gatekeepers' evaluation of the reports that these three areas are the most important in reports, yet are the most problematic in the students' writing, despite emphases placed on them in the course. Thus, knowledge ought to be obtained on how each of the three parts are done on the job, for example, on what constitutes a concise introduction, what kind of information should go inside a conclusion and what sort of information should be included for a feasible recommendation. Perhaps an improvement to the Report

Writing component is to now get students to write an Executive Summary as it forces students to utilize many of the skills mentioned thus far. It would also provide students with a better focus and clarity in their writing, which in itself is an important feature expected in a report Introduction.

In terms of the recommendation, students should be encouraged to apply their knowledge to the actual situations they are writing on. In fact, a major characteristic of an analytical report is that there should be some degree of analysis and application of facts, thus, it is important that their skills in writing recommendations be developed in order for the report to fulfill the requirements of an analytical report. Instructors should note, however, that students may find recommendations difficult to write. The awareness should be that there are areas which pose difficulties for students and these should be tackled to the maximum. Some of the report writing difficulties experienced by the student subjects in the study are listed below. The number in brackets indicate the number of respondents:

- Evaluating findings (3)
- Writing recommendations/proposing courses of action(4)(including course instructor)
- Finding the necessary data (1)

- Using appropriate language for report writing and writing (2)
 - Developing report writing style (1)
 - Learning to think critically (2)
2. With reference to workplace writing demands, the Report Writing component in the course may need a more situational approach to teaching reports. Such an approach may come in the following ways:
- a. Provide writing tasks with an emphasis on audience analysis/ awareness. Learning to consider the audience would help determine the safest and most effective approach to take when writing as well as the most appropriate word choice because different situations create different political risks for the writer (Thomas, 1995). For report writing, the findings of this study indicate that audience analysis plays a more practical role, in that it tells the writer of reports what exact information to include and where in the report it should be placed. Audience analysis also helps students to be aware of the reading process people in organisations go through thus forces them to pay particular attention to those parts of the report that specific category of people find important for their decision making.

- b. Thomas (1995) suggests that one of the ways that can prepare students realistically for the workplace is to have them do collaborative assignments, such as that already practised in the course. Winter (1995) found benefits in groupwork, in that it results in higher quality documents than individual writing in the business communication classroom. As this did not seem to be true for the reports in this study, investigation into groupworking among the student population at UKM may be necessary. Results of the student interview in this study indicate that collaborative report assignments may not have worked as well as expected. It was reported that in completing the report assignment, many students divided the group tasks among themselves up to the point of writing out parts of the report individually and handing in the reports without actually seeing how the different parts fit together. This in many ways defeated the purpose of groupworking in the course as a way to help students achieve their best writing skills.

It is quite difficult at this point to suggest any one particular measure that can maximise the benefits of collaborative writing, except to say that greater monitoring may be required and that teachers may need to sensitize the population of students to groupwriting tasks first before having them undertake major ones such as a report.

- c. Enlighten students on real world expectations with regard to written documents. Students need to know that making information accessible to readers in business organisation is crucial to successful business communication. The students have to know that information in a report is used by busy people who 'want to get in, get what they need and get out of the document as quickly as possible' (Redish et.al. in Odell and Goswami, 1985: 131). It is necessary that students be aware of the rigorous nature of workplace writing so that criteria such as conciseness, correctness in language use, clear introduction and conclusions and so forth (all of which have been highlighted in this study) will be clearer and more meaningful to students.

In addition, students also need to be taught to think and write quickly under time pressure as workplace writing situations usually cannot afford the two months that the students had in the course to write a report. According to Thomas (1995), writing in the workplace is not to create a work of art but simply to write clearly and to spend no more time than necessary to get the job done. It has also been claimed that students' thinking and writing speed improve dramatically during a 16 week course with at least 10-15 in-class assignments to be completed in 15 minutes (1995: 466). It

is rather interesting to note at this point that one of the students interviewed in the study stated that the time they had in the course to write the report was actually too long, and that a shorter time would force students to write better. His viewpoint, although contradictory from the rest of the students, may bear some weight especially when he made the point in reference to his own experience taking a similar report writing course elsewhere and his own parttime working experience.

4.6.2 Approach and Methodology with regard to Language and General Writing Skills

The findings of this study also indicate that good language use and good writing ability, in general, help contribute to an acceptable piece of writing (in this case a written report). This implies that additional emphasis on developing students' language and writing skills should be considered. Such a move may be implemented in the following ways:

1. There should be greater focus on providing students with the operational skills and strategies in basic language use for writing in the professional context. This is considered to be rather crucial due to the fact that the gatekeepers made extensive comments on basic writing skills such as coherence, word choice, spelling, and organization lacking in almost all

of the reports, and which may have little to do with the difficulty level of the topics given in the study. It would seem reasonable to say that the students may lack the language facility to operate effectively in English in a professional situation. Steps that can be taken to improve the success rate of student writers can include the following:

- a. Focus on general writing skills by perhaps looking at word and sentence level texts, especially for the benefit of those students whose initial level of English was weak. It is the kind of an 'explicit and principled prescription for communication' called for by Thomas (1995) in preparing students more effectively for real world communication. This involves telling students exactly what words and phrases can carry the intended message more effectively such as those which provide the conciseness and directness expected in a report. Providing students with such an instruction would seem to be a fair thing to do because in the course of their writing, they are faced with a bulk of information that needs to be reworded, rephrased and restructured. This requires quite tremendous language power on their part.

It is worth noting at this point that the results of the student questionnaire on the skills taught in the course revealed a few of the students' preference for including language/writing skills as

one of the skills taught in the course (Appendix P). When asked, they stated that this included such things as writing sentences, choosing the right words as well as grammar. Two students thought that Language and Format, both in general and that specific of reports were important areas but were not taught. One of the students even felt that the objective of the course should aim at helping students with their general writing skills. However, the course instructor pointed out that she did not focus much on language in the course due to lack of time, especially so when the students had problems in finding and writing the contents of the report itself. Findings of this study, however, indicate that the emphasis should be for developing students' ability to write well in the language.

2. Pay some attention to basic composition or academic writing skills such as coherence and unity in writing, summarizing and integrating and synthesizing information from different sources. These skills were seen in this study to be somewhat expected and necessary but were lacking in the reports. Although time constraints is a problem in the course, providing students with some practice in developing the skills above, at least in a small way, could help reduce the students' temptation to plagiarise. It would seem also that helping students out this way could help them write on the more factual and 'dry' topics

such as ISO 9000 and Quality System, to cite a few, in a much better way.

3. Greater efforts may need to be devoted to stages of the composing process, especially pre-writing. It is evident from the feedback given by the two gatekeepers in the study that communicating in writing is both product and process. Therefore, in addition to considering the textual features of texts/reports, other aspects figure quite prominently in the writing process. These include analysing the situation and context for writing, researching for information, brainstorming and planning out what to include, writing out an outline and so forth that go towards writing a better report. Taking students carefully through the process of producing the report would help encourage and develop the kind of information search skills, reasoning, analytical and basically thinking skills that the gatekeepers appear to expect from writers of reports. For the ESP teacher, it is actually forcing students to think and write in English.

The practice of allowing extensive prewriting, rewriting and revising should, however, be approached cautiously. According to Thomas (1995), most managers would probably not support such a time consuming approach to teaching business writing. Because time is money in the business environment, students need to be trained in the

classroom to try and get it right the first time (1995: 466). This could be a tall order for students whose proficiency in the language is poor, therefore, cannot be expected to write correctly for the first time. However, much of the time lost for rewriting and revising can be avoided if they organize their thoughts before they write.

4.6.3 Course Objectives, Standards and Other Considerations

It may also be necessary for the course to look into other areas such as course objectives and standards for purposes of course improvement:

1. Since it has been seen that writing situations may differ according to job demand, the Report Writing component in the course should consider providing instructions (or the least some knowledge) in writing reports for various kinds of communication. There is, however, the problem of time because both students and course instructor reported that time was a constraint in the course due to other areas of the course requirements. For the students, these also include requirements in other content courses they took in their respective departments. One of the implications of this is that report writing in the course may need to consider course requirements in relation to time by perhaps reducing course load if report writing forms a major course component.

2. The Report Writing component in the course might want to consider raising the standards of grading reports. It may well be fine for the course in terms of meeting its Report Writing objectives but may not be in terms of providing students with a realistic indication of their ability to perform in an occupational context. However, this suggestion is made based on the findings of this study. More research into investigating how graduates perform in a job situation will provide more conclusive evidence of the mismatch between the course and real world expectations. Either that or the course could consider its Report Writing objectives in the light of students' levels of writing ability, because as it is at present, expecting students to write an effective report, as stipulated in the course, may be too high of an expectation as it requires more than the students can deliver. This is in agreement with the course instructor's opinion on the objective of the Report Writing component. In fact, the gatekeepers' evaluation of the report shows that the students' reports fell short of their expectations of an 'acceptable' report, thus reflecting very little of the standards that the course had hoped to achieve. The students, however, were in agreement with the objective stated in the course, citing reasons mostly to do with the fact that report writing is important and useful for their future.
3. There needs to be a formative evaluation of the Report Writing component to look into many other areas for improvement. Some of

these have been highlighted above. They include approaches and methodology, time allocation and objectives. The students' feedback on the course was generally favourable, except on the aspect of time (Appendix Q). However, the researcher could not gain much more insights than that due to a poor turnout in the interviews.

4. All in all, a concerted effort should be taken to better understand the skills considered important to employers in order to develop those skills and facilitate the production of a fully 'acceptable' written product. The manner in which this should be undertaken is dependent on course committee/instructor but it would help to have some kind of a yardstick for writing determined by business professionals against which performance can be gauged. Presenting students with the opportunity to evaluate their performance against real world criteria would help them gain a sense of purpose in taking the course. It would also help ensure greater focus to the ESP course in question, therefore placing it in a better position within the university curricula.

4.7 SUMMARY

The results of this study show that report writing was an important part of the gatekeepers' work. In discussing the criteria they looked for in an analytical report, both acknowledged the importance of Content, Organization, Language and Style, Format, Layout and Visual Support, but judging from their comments on the reports and on their recommendations for areas of improvements, it can be seen that most emphasis was placed on Content. Almost all of the reports failed to meet with these criteria, despite the fact that the features looked for in each of the criteria were mainly attributes of basic writing skills. The reports apparently also lacked the features of an analytical report such as poor analyses of points, little up-to-date information on the online financial service industry, poor conclusions and recommendations, and most importantly, poor application to the context of financial service industry. As for the students/writers, the reports showed that they may have had an inadequate grasp of both language and content to write an acceptable report. The results of the study have important implications for report writing in the English for Business course at UKM.