

9 Formal Reports

In this unit you will...

- meet words and expressions about office consultation
- read a report about a Christmas party
- write reports, essays and articles



A Do you ever have to write formal reports in your job? What is easy/difficult in writing a report? Give three reasons why reports are written.

B What do the words and expressions in the vocabulary box mean?

suspicion, to be entitled to s.th, to mingle, a questionnaire, anonymous, a (prior) engagement, resentful, a committee, a grant, to let your hair down

C Put one item from the vocabulary box into each gap. You may need to adapt the word

One 1 not to be missed every year is Arnie Fischer's New Year Party. All trade unionists are 2 to attend, and can have a good time and 3. The guests eat, 4 and talk. Arnie has a 5 that not everybody who comes is really a trade unionist, but he is not 6 at paying for his or her food. 'If an 7 person wants to be with us, then so much the better,' he says.

D Very quickly read Mr Bibby's e-mail on the next page. What does he want?

1. more free time
2. to cancel the Christmas party
3. to re-think the Christmas party

E Look quickly at Gavin Pringle's report on the next page. What are the four parts into which the report is divided?

F Summarise in one sentence the findings of Gavin's survey of the staff.

G Summarise in one sentence Gavin's recommendations. Do you think he is right in his recommendations?

H The report is over 500 words long. Reduce the report to one of about 200 words (the length you will have to write in the exam)

H Imagine you are Mr Bibby. Write a letter to the staff telling them of the new arrangements for the Christmas party (add details to Gavin's recommendations). The beginning and ending of the letter have been given to you.

Dear Staff,

You will be thrilled to know that this whole question of the staff Christmas party has come up again. Many of you will have filled in the questionnaire that my assistant, Gavin Pringle, sent round. Well, decisions have been made, and here they are.

WRITE THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS HERE

Well, I hope everybody is looking forward to our Christmas feast this year.

Ralph Bibby,
Senior partner

Reports – real-life phrases

Report for the attention of...
I/We found/discovered that...
I/We recommend that...

To assistant@bibbyandjenner.com

From rbibby@bibbyandjenner.com

I'm completely fed up with signing cheques of / paying over EUR 7,000 for the firm's Christmas party. Nobody seems to enjoy it. Everybody just sits there looking bored and miserable, so my suspicion is that it is money down the drain. Anyway, I have no time to deal with the problem. Write me a full report and have it on my desk by a week Wednesday. Ralph.

Report for the attention of Mr R. Bibby, Senior Partner, Bibby and Jenner Management Consultants.

Subject: Possible changes to Bibby and Jenner's Christmas Party

Background

- 1 Every year since the foundation of the firm in 1970, Bibby and Jenner have held a Christmas party which has been free for all full-time members of staff employed at the company's head office. Each full-time member of staff has been entitled to bring one person as a guest for a fee (last year EUR 50). Attendance has grown so that in the past three years between 50 and 70 persons have been present.
- 2 The party in recent years has been held in the Grand Hotel in the centre of Grenberg. The format has been speeches, a five-course dinner, and then after-dinner speeches and mingling. The party has been held on the last working Friday before Christmas, beginning at 19.00 and running until 23.00.

Method

- 1 I wrote a questionnaire (attached), seeking the opinion of staff on the Christmas party. The questionnaire could be completed and returned anonymously. Eighty per cent of staff returned the questionnaire, and the rate of return did not vary significantly between departments. All subsequent information about staff attitudes is based on the returned questionnaires.

Results

- 1 A large majority (85%) felt that they were obliged to attend the party, even if they had prior engagements on that evening. Of these, 82% felt resentful at having to attend, which affected their enjoyment of the evening.
- 2 A majority (55%) enjoyed the speeches, but a substantial minority (39%) did not. The most common reasons cited were that the speeches focused only on the concerns of senior management. A large majority (90%) felt that the speeches were too long.
- 3 A concern of a large minority (45%) was that staff had to be 'well-behaved' at the party due to the attendance of senior management, and this limited their enjoyment. This feeling was strongest among the younger staff members (78%).
- 4 The current cost of bringing a guest to the party (EUR 50) was a problem for a substantial minority (47%). A clear majority favoured a simpler, cheaper and more open party (72%).
- 5 A major concern for a slight majority (55%) was the timing of the party on the last working Friday before Christmas. Many in the firm would have preferred to attend other engagements on that evening.

Recommendations

- 1 My main recommendation is to create two events instead of one: a formal end-of-year dinner with speeches in the Grand Hotel, and an informal Christmas party at another location.
- 2 The formal dinner would begin at 18.00, with a maximum of 45 minutes devoted to speeches (Mr Jenner and Mr Bibby only). The formal dinner would end at 20.30. Attendance at this event would still be 'expected'.
- 3 The informal party would be organised by the Staff Committee. The Committee would be given a small grant for this purpose. The party would start at 21.00, and would be an opportunity for the staff to 'let their hair down'.
- 4 Both events would be held on the Thursday of the last full working week before Christmas.
- 5 I propose that the guest fee be abolished.

Report by Gavin Pringle

Submitted to Mr Bibby: 14 October

Exam skills

- A What is a discursive essay? What is the purpose of a discursive essay?

Exam tip: No piece of writing will be effective and successful unless you know the purpose of the text.

- B How many sentences are there in a typical introduction? What is its purpose?

Exam tip: write short and clear introductions. Don't put information into the introduction which belongs in the body of the essay.



- C Look at the exam essay below. What is the function of each paragraph? What is the function of the text in italics?

Exam tip: In an essay there is a structure both within paragraphs and between paragraphs.

- D An argument in an essay can have every point simply contributing to *strengthening* the thesis of the essay, or it can have points which *modify* or *qualify* the initial thesis. The first type can often be a simple list, which fails to reflect the complexity of a particular issue. In the example essay below, where is the thesis modified?

Exam tip: good essays are more than simple lists.

- E What is the difference between the content of the introduction and the conclusion?

Exam tip: A conclusion should be based on the argument of the essay.

'Reports are the best means of communicating formal information': discuss.

(1) Reports are formal documents for conveying information within and between organisations. They are a vital form of communication.

(2) *Reports have a structure that can easily be recognised:* who commissioned the report, its remit, facts/findings and recommendation(s). The structure allows the information to be assimilated easily.

(3) *Reports are also effective because they require the use of formal language.* As a rule formal language leaves less room for ambiguity, and can be understood more easily when a report is read by someone with a different linguistic or ethnic background.

(4) *Reports are not appropriate for conveying certain types of information.* A resolution to be put to a meeting, for instance, will have a different format. Reports suggest a hierarchy, with a subordinate reporting to his/her superior(s), so where no such relationship exists other forms of communication (letters, e-mails) will probably be more appropriate.

(5) *In conclusion,* while reports have a key role to play in organisational communication, they are not appropriate in every case.

- F Now write the following essay: 'Writing reports is fun': discuss

Exam practice: To what extent do you agree with this statement?

- A Which of the tasks below would you choose? How important is the *topic*? How important is the *genre*? Discuss in groups.
- B Note down some important features of the following genres: essay, article, report.
- C Choose one of the topics below and write a plan. Discuss your plan with a partner.
- D Write your text, check it, and give it to your partner to improve.



'Economic growth is the solution to all social problems.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Write an essay. (ca. 200 words)

Think of an advertising campaign for a product which you have seen. Imagine you work for the company that produces that product. Write a report for the managing director of the company on the effectiveness of the campaign.

Write a report. (ca. 200 words)

You have been asked to write an article for a national newspaper on the economic situation in your town.

Write an article. (ca. 200 words)

E

Which of the following would you use in an essay? Why? What are their functions?

In conclusion..., First, I think..., It has been argued that..., On the one hand..., A lot of people say..., In other words..., As a result..., In my Dad's opinion..., I don't know much about this..., Additionally..., However,...

F

The following essay has been given an introduction and a conclusion. Complete the essay. You have 150 words for the main part of your essay.

'The only motivation of business is to maximise profit.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Businesses operate in a commercial environment, and the main motivation of their owners is to maximise profits. Businesses, on a day-to-day basis, however, have a range of objectives. (28 words)

In conclusion, businesses exist to make profit. All other objectives in the majority of cases are subordinate to the drive for profits. (22 words)

Unit 13: Formal Reports

- (p. 1) A **Purposes of reports:** to collect together information; to provide a clear and logical record; to show that a matter is of some importance; to provide the basis for action.
- (p. 1) C 1. engagement, 2. entitled, 3./4. mingle / let their hair down, 5. suspicion, 6. resentful, 7. anonymous
- (p. 1) D **Option 3:** Mr Bibby wants his assistant to suggest ways to stop EUR 7,000 being wasted on a Christmas party that nobody enjoys.
- (p. 1) E 1. background 2. method 3. results/findings 4. recommendations
- (p. 1) F The staff felt that the current party was too formal and expensive, and not held at the best time.
- (p. 1) G There should be two parties: firstly a formal dinner, and then following that an informal party organised by the staff committee.
- (p. 3) A An discursive essay is about taking a statement, stating the arguments for and against it and finally coming to a reasoned conclusion.
- (p. 3) B An introduction in a short essay should consist of no more than two sentences. The first is an *orientation statement* (which puts the matter in context); the second is the *thesis* (the argument you are making across the whole essay).
- (p. 3) C 1 introduction, 2 illustration of essay thesis, 3 ditto, 4 modifying the thesis, 5 conclusion
- (p. 3) D The essay modifies the thesis in the fourth paragraph.
- (p. 3) E The introduction sets out what is to be proved in the essay; the conclusion establishes what has been proved in the paragraphs of the essay.
- (p. 4) B **Essay:** formal register, logical and standard structure, argumentative, impersonal
Article: formal or informal, informative/argumentative, logically structured, opens and closes with powerful points.
Report: formal, clearly signalled parts, bullet points, economic use of language
- (p. 4) E In conclusion..., It has been argued that..., On the one hand..., In other words..., As a result..., Additionally..., However...