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Table 1: Importance of good communication

- In the absence of natural talent, good preparation is all there is
- Whitehall*
- Thoughtful prose
 - Essays decorated with the occasional number
 - I have met very senior civil servants who prepared for a presentation to the cabinet as if it was just another seminar.
 - 'My usual approach is to wing it.' Breathtaking!
 - Departmental presentations were dreadfully lacking in focus, full of lists and PowerPoint bullets and, above all, long-winded
 - I was repeatedly struck by the inability of so many key officials to present anything in five minutes.
- Written reports*
- I provided him [Tony Blair] with a five to ten line summary of my views on each of the priorities.
 - Delete management jargon
 - Sharpen the messages
 - Call a spade a spade
 - Clear messages for the next steps
 - Short crisp report
 - One-page summary of the necessary action.
 - We decided in retrospect that our delivery reports had become too wordy and wide-ranging.
- Presentations*
- Obsessed with using the slot (presentation to cabinet) well.
 - Clear the diary and focus on the presentation
 - By the time I had presented, I had rehearsed on my own several times
 - I obsessed over every detail of the presentation: the graphs, the phrases, the pace and timing of the key messages.
 - Spent more than 20 hours preparing
 - We became experts in the Delivery Unit not just at analysing the data but at presenting it so that a busy Prime Minister, at a glance, could understand the key message.
 - Presentations were sharp, clear, brief
 - I got scared for this [press conference] in my usual obsessive way.
- Media*
- It is important to manage the media well. Spin really does matter. The danger comes when it is divorced from substance.
- Inter-personal*
- Never being defensive, whingey or long-winded
- Meetings*
- We spent hours preparing to be effective in short meetings (Blaise Pascal (1657): *Je n'ai fait celle-ci plus longue que parce que je n'ai pas eu le loisir de la faire plus courte*. I have made this letter longer than usual because I lack the time to make it shorter)
 - Summing-up at the end of meetings of ten or 12 really telling points.
 - He acknowledged that he prepared the summing-up before the meeting began.
 - Anyone chairing a meeting who is on top of the issues should be able to predict with an accuracy of 80 per cent or more what issues will emerge and how to deal with them.

Source: Michael Barber (2007) *Instruction to Deliver*. Methuen & Co. Ltd.

1.3 Takeaway

After reading these notes, students will learn how to present material more clearly, parsimoniously, effectively and efficiently.

3.4.2 Vary presentation

Vary your presentation (not font styles – see later comment) to make the report more interesting and readable. Use of bullets, tables, and diagrams etc. helps to summarise issues and focus the readers' attention, especially where there is a lot of text to be read. Use bullets where appropriate to list points especially where an overview or summary is provided. This can add to the readability of your report.

Limited and appropriate use of colour can improve appearance.

Use the most up-to-date technology available i.e. word processor (e.g. Microsoft Word) and a good quality printer.

3.4.3 Length and format

Maximum length, in terms of number of words, may be specified. There is no necessary relationship between quality and length of report. However, there is a trend towards concise, brief reports. Briefer reports are more likely to reflect sharp and clear thinking (Allen, 1973). Padding is very irritating for busy executives under extensive time pressure.

Choice of font and spacing (single, space and a half, double spacing) will influence the number of pages e.g. 10,000 words, space and a half, in *Times New Roman* 12 point font will be approximately 45-50 pages.

3.4.4 Page numbers

The report should include page numbers. The introductory/preface material should be numbered using lower case roman numerals (i, ii, iii etc). The first page of Chapter 1 should be numbered page 1. Page numbers should be centred at the bottom of the page. I think page numbers look best in 10 point. They should be in the same font style as the text in the report.

3.4.5 Font styles and sizes

Modern computers have a wide range of font styles and sizes from which to choose. You should choose a font that is plain and not too fussy (for example, *Times New*

Tables should be capable of being read without reading the commentary to the table. Tables should contain all relevant information and should be capable of interpretation on their own.

Further advice on presentation of tables and figures is provided in Section 4.4.

3.6 Producing the final document

Leave plenty of time at the end for the production process. Reports need to be carefully proof-read - at least twice, by calling it over with another person - preferably someone experienced and with a good eye for detail.

Using Word's *Print Preview*, check the paging before printing your document, especially for dangling headings (which can be fixed with the *Keep with next* command in Word).

You should print the final version excluding the table of contents. Only then can you put in page numbers (and be certain they won't change) and print the table of contents.

3.7 Using readability software

The Bull Index, which can be downloaded for free (<http://www.fightthebull.com>), can help in improving writing style. For example, I have applied the Bull Index to these guidelines, with the following results.

Keasey, K. and P. McGuinness 1991. Prospectus earnings forecasts and the pricing of new issues on the unlisted securities market. *Accounting and Business Research* 21 (82): 133-145.

Leftwich, R., R. Watts and J. Zimmerman. 1981. Voluntary corporate disclosure: the case of interim reporting. *Journal of Accounting Research* 19 (Supplement): 50-77.

Marston, C. L. and P. J. Shrives. 1991. The use of disclosure indices in accounting research: A review article. *British Accounting Review* 23 (3): 195-210.

Ruland, W., S. Tung and N.E. George. 1990. Factors associated with the disclosure of managers' forecasts. *The Accounting Review* 65 (3): 710-721.

Spero, L. L. 1979. The Extent and Causes of Voluntary Disclosure of Financial Information in Three European Capital Markets: An Exploratory Study. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

Strunk, William Jr., and E.B. White. 2000. *The Elements of Style*. 4th edition, Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Tufte, E. R. 1983. *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Cheshire, Conn: Graphics Press.