Understanding the Report Process and Research Methods

Business Communication, 15e
Lehman and DuFrene
The Formal-Informal Report Continuum
Characteristics of Reports

Reports are . . .

- Generally requested by a higher authority and often travel upward in an organization
- Logically organized and objective
- Generally prepared for a limited audience
Types of Reports

- Formal vs. informal
- Short vs. long
- Informational vs. analytical
- Vertical vs. lateral
- Internal vs. external
- Periodic or scheduled
- Functional
You’re the Professional

You are to prepare a report for the operations VP about whether your company should offer an in-house daycare center for employees’ children.

What kind of report would you prepare? Explain your answer.

Student responses here:
The Problem-Solving Process

1. Recognize and ________ the problem
2. Select a method of __________
3. Collect and __________ data and document the sources
4. Arrive at an __________
Five Questions for Limiting the Problem

- **What** is it that I wish to find out?
- **Why** is the information needed?
- **When** must the report be completed?
- **Where** is the study limited to?
- **Who** will read and use the information?

Clearly identifying the problem will help with targeting research
Conducting Research

- Primary research — relies on _________ _______ and obtains information from pertinent individuals or observations

- Secondary research — provides information that other experts have already _________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Sources</th>
<th>Secondary Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Customer surveys</td>
<td>• Newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Market research</td>
<td>• Magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Operational research</td>
<td>• Journals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Historical research</td>
<td>• Abstracts</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Performance observation</td>
<td>• Almanacs/fact books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Product development</td>
<td>• Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Financial reports</td>
<td>• Government documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Employee surveys</td>
<td>• Online sources</td>
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Objectives of Secondary Research

- Establish a point of __________ for further research
- Avoid needless ______________ of costly research effort
- __________ areas of needed research
- Make a real ______________ to the body of knowledge
Problems with Internet Resources

- Resources are not always accurate and reliable
- Certain uses of site information may constitute copyright violation
- Resources are not always complete in terms of information or updating
- Electronic periodicals are not always subjected to same rigor as printed periodicals
Techniques for Using the Internet Effectively

- Choose your search engine or database appropriately
- Structure searches from broad to specific
- Use quotation marks for literal topics
- Look for pages that have links to other sites
- Be adaptable to access formats
Taking Effective Notes

- Read an article rapidly
- Put the article aside
- List the main and supporting points from memory
- Review the article to verify significant points
Sampling: Help for the Overwhelmed Researcher

- Eliminates need to question 100 percent of population
- Uses random group from population to represent entire population
Indicators of Effective Research

Validity

• Does the data measure what was intended?
• Were instruments pilot tests?

Reliability

• Are outcomes consistent (repeatable) over time or independent samples?
• Is sample size sufficiently large?
Common Errors in Data Collection

- Samples that are too small
- Samples that are not representative
- Poorly constructed data-gathering instruments
- Information that comes from biased sources
- Too little information
- Too much information that is not relevant
Common Errors in Data Interpretation

- Conforming results to prediction or desire
- Hoping for spectacular results
- Comparing when commonality is absent
- Assuming a cause-and-effect relationship when one does not exist
- Failing to consider important factors
- Basing conclusions on lack of evidence
- Assuming constancy of behavior
Reasons for Accurate, Complete Documentation

- Gives credit where credit is due (highly ethical conduct)
- Protects writers against charges of plagiarism
- Supports statements and thus increases credibility
- Aids researchers in pursuing similar research