

English Technical Communication for Japanese Managers, Engineers and Technical Translators Presented by The University of Michigan

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Outline

Is your Technical/Business report Read and understood by your intended audiences?

国際的に日本人の英語レベルの低さが取り沙汰され、英語教育は小学校から始めるとか、果ては日本の前首相の Advisory Committee が英語を第2公用語にすべきと提案するなど、かまびすしいが、つまるところは日本人の International Communication が下手で、G-8一員であるにも拘わらず日本からの国際的な情報発信が極めて少ないことに由来していると考えられる。しかし、これは単に英語レベルの低さだけがその Communication 下手の主な原因であると決めつけて済むことであろうか。

A native speakerに言わせると日本人の Convention として "Lack of exposure to the English language"、所謂、折角学習した英語を実生活で活用しないことが主な原因との事であるが、何故か？ それが日本人の Convention であるからか？

私は英語学習歴の比較的長い日本人でも英語の 特に Writing Convention を知らないのが大きな原因の一つではなかろうかと思う。また、この Writing Convention を教えている日本の大学はごく一部を除いて私は殆ど知らない。

この Convention や文化の違いを乗り越えて、欧米人と良好な Writing communication を行うためには日本の従来の学校英語も必要であるが、それだけに終わらせることなく、欧米の Writing convention を理解し、正しい English communication skill を身に付けることが、今や、最も求められていると思われる。

筆者は昨年8月に米国のミシガン大学工学部で実施された日本人マネージャー/技術者/技術翻訳者向け English Technical Communication Seminar を受講したので、この機会にごく一部の概要のみをお伝えし、そこから全体を感じ取って戴き、英語国民だけでなく世界に通用する Communication skill の必要性を考える機会にして戴ければ幸いである。

Description of the seminar

Despite having good skills in English grammar and sentence structure, Japanese intellectuals are often said to have poor communication skills with Westerners. Because their way of thinking is generally quite opposite to that of Westerners.

The seminar offered by the University of Michigan is one solution for those Japanese who wish to acquire communication skills in writing with Westerners.

1. My personal remarks on the seminar

Having participated in the seminar last summer held at the University of Michigan, my personal remarks on the seminar are summarized as the following.

- (1) For Writing technical English, non-technical people, who do not understand technical fields, are inclined to think that it is impossible to acquire the skill. However, I notice the skill is useful for any participant regardless of technical ability. It could even be applied to our Japanese technical/business society.
- (2) As for international communication, basic English proficiency is necessary, but not good enough to manage technical/business communication. With this writing skill, our way of thinking becomes international and we can easily understand the way of thinking of American technical/business people who also learned the same skill at universities in the U.S.A.
If you want to show leadership at any international conference, this skill is very useful to persuade its participants.
- (3) The writing skill program was originally provided for regular students at the university for a three month duration, however, this intensive seminar is only 5 days in duration.

Reading through the book 『科学技術英語の実例と書き方(Modern Rhetoric for English Technical Documents)』, 南雲堂発行、co-authored by Professors Yoshiaki Shinoda, J.C.Mathes and Dwight W.Stevenson, lecturers of the seminar, prior to the seminar and reviewing the seminar upon returning to Japan, I understood the skill better and heightened the value of my study abroad.

2. Purpose of the seminar

The seminar titled "English Technical Communication" is arranged specially for Japanese managers, engineers, and technical translators wanting to acquire effective communication skills for writing technical and business reports.

One typical serious accident that occurred in the U.S.A., due to the lack of communication skill

You would remember the Three Mile Island nuclear energy plant accident, in the U.S.A. on 28 March 1979, which occurred because of an insufficiently worded operating manual that led to a meltdown of its reactor.

Fear that an inadequate description in the manual may cause a serious accident, came to light a year before the actual accident occurred.

Due to a previous minor accident, an engineer responsible for the reactor coolant system noticed a fault in the operating manual for the system and advised the company to make necessary changes to the operating manual.

However, due to poorly titled and written memos, his recommendations were not acted upon or instigated. Therefore, the operating manual was not changed. If the manual had been correctly changed and acted upon, the accident would not have occurred.

Even in Japan, we have seen many similar cases not only in connection with Japanese nuclear energy plant and processing facilities, but also other social and industrial accidents due to incorrect communications.

The seminar covers many accidents that have occurred in American industry and society in general due to poor communication and suggests how these communication problems could be eliminated.

3. Problems of Japanese writers

Allegedly, Japanese English speakers are good in grammar and sentence structure, but due to the following reasons, they rarely communicate well with Westerners in the written form.

5. Recommended basic structure for technical/business documents

It is impossible to describe the whole seminar here, but the following is one example of a very basic writing format.

Adapt the following to many document types:

*Whatever the type of technical document, think in terms of four "levels" of information:

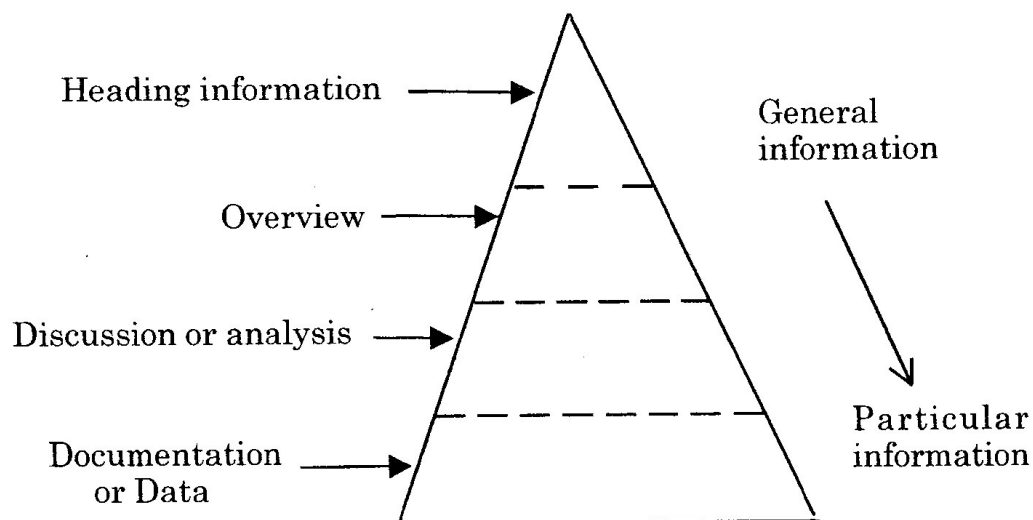
- Heading
- Overview
- Discussion or Analysis
- Attachments and Documentation

*Move from general information to particular information, always overall; within the major levels of the document; and even within the sections, units, paragraph clusters, and paragraphs that make up the document.

*Use selective redundancy, not mere repetition

*Make substantial use of devices to permit selective reading and random access.

Illustration of recommended basic structure



where each section includes the following.

Mind dump writing - Illogical structure in a report

- Writing purpose is unclear.
- Outline or summary is usually inadequate or overlooked.
- Long seasonal or personal greetings usually begin the correspondence instead of key sentences or the business topic.
- The most important sentences are placed at the end of the report.
- Generally, no consideration for the reader occurs.
- Business or technical reports lack any system or order in relation to standard western business reports. Formatting is lacking.

4. Comparison of Japanese and American corporations

The following table shows the comparison of Japanese and American practices in corporate communications, which was explained at the seminar based on a report authored by William V.Ruch, Quorum Books, London, 1984.

Internal Corporate Communication: Japanese and American Corporations

	Japanese Corporations	American Corporations
Purpose	Transmit information, provide emotional message	Transmit information, provide conclusions, recommendations, and support
System	Strong Informal	Strong Formal
Direction	Strong upward communication Strong horizontal	Strong downward communication Weak horizontal
Factors	Non-verbal elements are important.	Non-verbal elements are almost ignored.
Prefer	Indirect communication	Direct communication
Decisions	By consensus	By individuals
Mode	Meetings frequent and long Compromise, conciliation	Meetings less frequent, shorter Confrontation, assertion
Emphasis	Paper is less important than personal understanding	<u>Only if it is in writing does it really count.</u>
Key	"Logic of adaption: negotiate, adapt attitude depending on attitude of others"(K. Hamada)	"Logic of choice: Specify alternatives and choose one strategy"

Heading information:

- Identification of the recipients
- Identification of the senders
- Date of issuance
- Subject line or title that defines the topic and purpose of the document

Overview:

This is important for giving readers a summary of your long report.

- A definition of the problem, investigation, and purpose of the document
- A forecast of structure, if the document is long enough and complex enough to merit a preview of structure
- A summary of the significant results, conclusions, recommendations, and implications that represent the output of the technical work behind the document. Be especially careful to "foreground" any action items such as decisions, deadlines, responsibilities.

Remember that time, money, and responsibility are the three things we all worry about.

Discussion or analysis:

- Justification and support for all conclusions and recommendations presented in the overview
- Selective presentation of the particulars that explain the reasoning used to arrive at these conclusions
- Presentation of intermediate levels of supporting detail
- Direct answers to the questions or objections which members of the Primary audience may be expected to have

Documentation or data:

- Justification and documentation for the interpretations and analysis presented in the discussion
- Presentation of self-sufficient explanations of the procedures, tables of results, calculations, printouts, detailed drawings, relevant documents, etc.
- Presentation of relevant but non-essential information which may be necessary for the document.

The above description is a small part of the whole seminar, apart from other

important functions including writing for audiences in organizations, addressing the needs of your readers, defining your communication purpose, writing and editing paragraphs, formatting the document, and using electronic communication tools(e-mail,etc.).

Attachment- Seminar program

The seminar duration is 5 days, being the equivalent to the three month course offered to regular students.

Seminar Program(example)

Day	Contents
1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opening: Overview of Course 2. American Business and Technical Communication Conventions 3. The Basic Structure of Technical Documents 4. Basic Structure Workshop 5. Purpose of Documents
2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Purpose Workshop 2. Critique of Purpose Workshop 3. The Importance of Summary 4. Summary Workshop
3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Critique of Summary Workshop 2. Paragraphs in Technical Documents 3. Paragraph Workshop 4. Composition Workshop 5. Persuasive Patterns in Technical Documents
4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Persuasive Pattern Workshop 2. Critique of Persuasive Pattern Workshop 3. Informative Patterns in Technical Documents 4. Informative Pattern Workshop
5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Critique of Information Pattern Workshop 2. Problem Areas for Japanese Writers 3. The Legal Context for Technical Documents

The program contents are subject to change without prior notice.

Contact address

General information about technical communication program presented at the University of Michigan for general students can be obtained from its home page:

University of Michigan College of Engineering
<http://www.engin.umich.edu/>

As for further information regarding the seminar including other seminars presented in Japan, please contact the following addresses:

Japan Association for Technical Communication

c/o Mizuno or Hamamoto

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すくらっぷ

漱石の「ロンドン留学日記」

夏目漱石がイギリスに留学したのは明治33年、西暦1900年のことだからちょうど100年前である。当時の日記のなかで英語に関する項目を拾ってみるのも楽しい。

1901年1月11日：己の英語のできぬことに気付かずして人の英語を笑うものあり。笑われる者正しくして笑うものの方が間違える場合なきにあらず。妄りに西洋通がるもかえってこの類ならん。

同12日：倫敦上流の言語は明晰にて上品なり。standardならんか。これなら大抵分かるなり。かかる次第故西洋人と見て妄りに信仰すべからず。また妄りに恐るべからず。しかし、Prof.などは博学なものなり。それすら難問を出して苦めること容易なり。

同30日：世間知らずの英国の女にはこまる。或る婆さんは御前はsuperstitionという字を知っているかと尋ねた。下宿の婆さんはtunnelという字を知っているかと聞いた。呆れて物が言えぬ。

同31日：下宿の神さんがそんなに勉強して日本へ帰ったらさぞ金持ちになるだろうといった。好笑。

平岡敏夫編：漱石日記、岩波文庫、1990年