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Topic: Informal Business Reports

Subtopic: Informal Reports: Topic Identification

Content Creator Name: Nathan Hurwitz

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### **Mutliple-Choice Question Type**

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1. What is the first step in identifying the topic and subtopics of your informal business report?

- a. study the assignment.
- b. know your readership.
- c. compile your data.
- d. look at older reports, to know what worked in the past.

Analysis:

- a. Correct. Begin by looking at what you have been tasked to accomplish in your report. This should make it very clear to you what your topic is, and then what your subtopics should be after that.
- b. Incorrect. Understanding your readership is important in writing a report, but it will not help you to identify the topic and subtopics of your report.
- c. Incorrect. You cannot compile data until you know what you are compiling it for – this work cannot be done until your topic and subtopics are chosen.
- d. Incorrect. While you certainly could look at older reports to determine what has been effective in the past, this will not help you focus on identifying the topic and subtopics of your report.

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2. If you are tasked with preparing a report comparing 3 potential new health insurance plans, in order to select the most effective one for the organization, which is most likely to be a subtopic of your report?

- a. a brief history of the insurance industry.
- b. a review of local hospitals and other treatment locations.
- c. a yardstick of specific criteria of what your company would find useful in an insurance plan.
- d. an overview of all possible insurance plans, from which these 3 have been chosen.

Analysis:

- a. Incorrect. While a brief history of the insurance industry might be interesting, it has nothing to do with the task that is at hand, helping to choose the best plan for your company from 3 specific possibilities.
- b. Incorrect. A review of local healthcare providers would probably be of interest to HR to make available to the employees at large, but does not bear on the immediate question of your report, which is to select which of these 3 healthcare plans is best for your organization.
- c. Correct. A yardstick of specific criteria of what your company would find most useful in a healthcare plan speaks to the heart of the matter of your report, choosing which plan is best for the company. This would allow the reader to examine the data and conclude for themselves which plan would serve the company best.
- d. Incorrect. Stepping back to introduce all of the plans that have already been rejected in favor of the 3 that are currently in contention does not help achieve your goal, it only muddies the water by adding information that cannot bear directly on the decision.

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3. If you are preparing an informal business report looking at sales trends at a fast food restaurant in Bethlehem, PA throughout the day, in order to properly staff shifts, which of the following topics is most likely to be important to your report?

- a. a list of manufacturers in the area and the times that their shifts change.
- b. a nutritional breakdown of the foods offered.
- c. a history of how sales grew to the point where they are at now.
- d. a breakdown of sales by gender.

Analysis:

- a. Correct. Larger manufacturers in the area may likely have an impact on sales spikes throughout the day as workers arriving at work would likely stop for coffee and breakfast food, while workers leaving their shift are likely to stop by to pick up dinner.
- b. Incorrect. While a nutritional breakdown of the foods that the restaurant serves might help to improve the menu (thereby improving sales), it does not help to understand current trends to properly staff shifts.
- c. Incorrect. While this might be a nice piece of information to have in general, it does not inform the task at hand, which is helping to properly staff shifts now.
- d. Incorrect. Breaking down sales by gender might help the branding and marketing people come up with foods more attractive to your lower demographic group, but it does not help you to better staff shifts.

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4. Which of the following topics would be MOST useful in preparing an informal report designed to help shape the timeline for the release of a new line of golf clothing?

- a. A Monthly Breakdown of the Current Line of Golf Clothes Sales Data.
- b. What the Well-Dressed Golfer is Wearing.
- c. A Complete List of New Golf Courses Being Built and their Scheduled Opening Dates
- d. A Breakdown of Sales of the Current Golf Clothing Line by Gender

Analysis:

- a. Correct. Monthly breakdown of current sales would certainly inform when you might want to introduce your new line to get maximum impact on the market.
- b. Incorrect. While this article might help inform the team developing the line, it would be of little use to the team who is scheduling the release.
- c. Incorrect. What new golf courses are planning on opening and when will probably have very little impact on the sale of golf clothes, and certainly not the scheduling of a new line..
- d. Incorrect. Breaking down current sales by gender would not be terrible useful unless it was included sales demographics by gender AND time. If that were addressed you might discover that releasing women's and men's clothing should be handled differently. But as written this heading is not useful.

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5. You have been tasked with creating an informal report on the sale of tennis balls in order to find ways of reducing production and distribution cost. Early on you discover that three times as many tennis balls are sold in New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and California, what theme or topic might this raw data suggest you include in your report?

- a. the number of private tennis clubs in those states mentioned.
- b. possibility locations for relocating manufacturing to the Southern U.S. or Mexico.
- c. the popularity of tennis in high schools in Southern states.
- d. the number of professional tennis stars by region.

Analysis:

- a. Incorrect. This information has little or nothing to do with streamlining the production or distribution of tennis balls..

- b. Correct. If you can locate manufacturing closer to your major distribution points you could reasonably expect to reduce transportation costs..
- c. Incorrect. You have already determined that more balls are sold in those states, finding out if tennis is popular in high schools does not add appreciably to your understanding of this phenomenon.
- d. Incorrect. The number of tennis stars is irrelevant to your point, which is finding out how to streamline the production and distribution cost..

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6. In creating an informal business report, what is the most important factor of those below when it comes to focusing on a topic and sub-topics?
- a. The most current and up-to-date data and trends you can get.
  - b. What is currently a “hot” topic in the industry.
  - c. What is of most interest to you – if you are interested in what you write your readers will be too.
  - d. The specific needs of the reader from this report.

Analysis:

- a. Incorrect. The most current and up to date data and trends are always important, but they are not the focus of any paper, so they should inform it rather than define it.
- b. Incorrect. While there are informal business reports on what is hot, unless that is the specific question you set out to answer, this information is not terribly useful.
- c. Incorrect. What interests you may not be what the reader wants to find out about in this business report. While you are always advised to write from a place of genuine interest, this should not guide the selection of topic and sub-topics.
- d. Correct. Any business report, formal or not, begins with a specific need. This need will define the topic of the paper as well as all of the subtopics that flesh the paper out.

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7. Why is it important to begin creating an informal business report from an outline which should include the overall topic and then the important sub-topics you will touch upon?
- a. to keep your writing on track.
  - b. it does not necessarily have to start with an outline if your thinking is solid enough.
  - c. so that you can show your superiors if they are unhappy with the final result.

d. because this is how it has traditionally been done.

Analysis:

a. Correct. Starting with an outline will help you to hit on all of the important points in an organized and structured order. You will make your points known in such a way that they build on each other.

b. Incorrect. You should always start with an outline. It is very easy to get off track if you try to write it 'free-form.'

c. Incorrect. Nobody will ever see your outline, it is a device that you use to structure your writing. It is never of any use to anyone else.

d. Incorrect. Whether or not this is how it has traditionally been done, starting with a structure and an outline works.

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8. When writing a business report on hotel room occupancy in off-peak months in order to strategize marketing in the off-season months, which subtopic below is likely to be of the MOST use?

a. top sellers of the year.

b. February in Buffalo, a case study in promotion.

c. why people travel to beaches in the winter.

d. frequent traveller programs, their advantages and disadvantages.

Analysis:

a. Incorrect. This report is supposed to look at occupancy in the off-months, not the top sellers, which would most likely have been in the good seasons.

b. Correct. Looking at how one cold-weather city has marketed in the off-season and how effective that has been could be greatly enlightening.

c. Incorrect. Since this is not a report on where to divert travellers, but rather how to market down markets in off-seasons, this is not pertinent material..

d. Incorrect. Frequent traveller programs may have some peripheral relationship to the topic, but it strays away from the subject at hand. If there is any important information to be learned here, this will not be the MOST likely of these subtopics to be usefu..

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