REPORT WRITING

FRAUD⊙PEDIA

COMBATING FRAUD IN INDIA
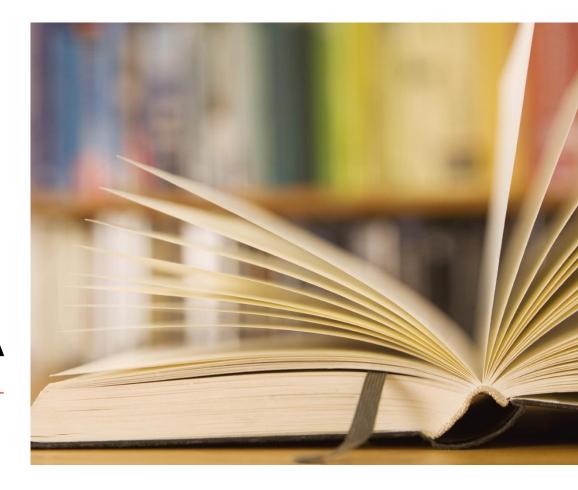
Table of Contents

Background

◦ Precise and clear writing is essential and paramount in our practice

◦ Documenting is as important as conducting an investigation or analysis

◦ Reports form the basis of actions by:
  ◦ Board of Directors
  ◦ Committee of Creditors
  ◦ Regulators

◦ Hence, Reports reflect on us – individually and on the Firm that you represent

Types of Reports

1. Background checks

2. Investigation

3. Disputes – expert witness reports

4. Other ad hoc reports – memos, information requests, status updates etc.

Always assume that the written document will be shared outside with third parties; Use appropriate language, grammar and tone.

Structure of Report

- Ensure that the Report complies with Reporting Standards as applicable.

    - ACFE Reporting Standards

    - ICAI Forensic Accounting and Investigation Standards

- Be careful while concluding or expressing an opinion:

    - Separate facts from opinion;

    - Include only facts that are relevant to the scope or allegation being investigated;

    - Ensure that your opinion and facts are supported with evidence that was properly collected and reviewed.

- Do not expect a well-written report if the investigation is poorly or inadequately performed.

- Take extra care while sharing 'draft' or 'interim' reports.

Structure of Report

1. Do not include anything that is not supported by facts

2. Do not include items that were not part of the agreed scope or procedures

3. Do not speculate or guess

4. Do not introduce a recommendation without a observation

5. Do not criticize or comment (positive or negative) on people, process, systems

6. Be careful while using absolutes – 'never', 'always', 'worst ever', 'best ever' etc.

7. Use a neutral and balanced tone; let the evidence and facts speak for themselves.

8. Avoid any bias or judgment

9. Address people respectfully and consistently; use titles, if needed.

10. Have someone else read the report especially someone who is not from the engagement to ensure that the information is clear and the recommendations or analysis makes sense.

Structure of Report

- Structure may vary based on type of report but it is important to structure the report so that it is clear and readable

- Common structure that you can use:

  - Table of Contents

  - Glossary

  - List of documents considered/relied upon

  - List of annexures – prepared by you

  - List of exhibits – shared by client or in public domain

  - Introduction or Background

  - Executive Summary

  - Other sections – one section for each key finding

  - Disclaimers – critical to have this in each report; Use standard language and terms

Language

1. UK English or US English

2. Active voice v. passive voice

3. Simple, jargon free, acronym free; Be succinct

4. Write for your audience – client in India, US, UK, regulator, arbitral panel, other?

5. Consistency in common terms; define the word first time it is used and use the defined term throughout the Report.

6. One idea, one paragraph

7. Simple sentences that are clear, concise and precise

8. Short sentences and short paragraphs

9. Avoid long sentences and combined sentences

10. Avoid sentences that are essentially one paragraph

Style and Format

- Font – Easy to read; one font and sensible spacing

- Headers should repeat at the beginning of each table

- Use Section headings and sub-headings

- No run-off text or tables; change to landscape orientation

- Use comma and semi-colon carefully; not excessive

- Use of the word 'the' – does not make it fancy!

- Format the report – indent, paragraph etc.

- Spell check and read as Word will not pick up a wrong word spelt correctly

- Long tables, data etc. in Appendices or Annexures

- KISS principle

Conclusion

- Report writing is a critical skill for professionals.

- A poorly written report can lead to:

  - A dissatisfied client;

  - Regulatory action for incorrect or unsupported report

  - Damage the professional's reputation.

- Reports should be accurate; in content, spelling, grammar, and basic data such as dates, names, events.

- Use clear and simple language to eliminate any possible doubt or ambiguity about what you are intending to convey

- The facts must speak for themselves; avoid bias