

(e) Local Colour

When you are reporting from a foreign post, try to work into your article something of the atmosphere there and some information on how business is carried on. A report on the market in Ghana, for example, might well make some mention of the "market mammies", the petty traders seen in local West African markets. Be careful about including a great deal of historical material or background information. It will overload your article and perhaps elbow out commercial information. In writing about coffee, for instance, remember that Canadian importers want details on production, prices, export prospects, etc., rather than a history of coffee-growing.

(f) Canadian Usage

"Foreign Trade" has been criticised for giving values in foreign currencies rather than in Canadian dollars, and for using foreign weights and measures. Whenever possible, convert values, weights, measures, etc., into their Canadian equivalents. Do not use expressions like "hire purchase" or "goods waggons" that are unfamiliar to Canadian readers. Use "billion" only in the Canadian sense of a "thousand million". In statistical tables, use periods only to indicate decimal points.

(g) Personal touch

Reports for "Foreign Trade" need not always be strictly impersonal. When an article contains material gathered by the author during a visit to the country covered, it is worthwhile to say so. It is sometimes useful to write in the first person — for example, in describing some development project that you have visited.

(h) Conclusion

The concluding paragraph of a report deserves as much attention as the opening one. Too often the reports we receive don't conclude — they just stop. Round out your article with a final paragraph that sums up the material presented, re-states the problem and the possible solution, or reaches some conclusion.

3. What are the most common shortcomings in the style of reports as opposed to the content? Five of them are listed below.

(a) Excessive use of the passive voice.

Sticking to the active voice and to transitive verbs as much as possible makes for lively writing even on difficult subjects. "The Economist" will provide plenty of examples. Civil servants are particularly prone to choose the passive. Strong, expressive verbs also make for good writing. Don't overwork the verb "to be".