

Writing Workshop Report

VBERC Team

This report is in continuation of the “Report on the Techno-Commercial Writing Workshop for Tehri Hydro Development Corporation Limited Executives” (THDCIL) that was published in LLT 7. The workshop was held from 17 to 26 November 2014 at VBERC, Udaipur. The main objective of the workshop was to help the Executives of THDCIL develop reading and writing skills, particularly in the field of hydroelectric power.

The earlier report contained details of the first component of the workshop—the “contact period” including the structure of the workshop, the process of workshop, and the outcome. The present report is of the second component of the workshop—the “distance mode”, and focuses on the structure and functioning of the distance mode assignments and their monitoring.

The major outcomes of the “contact period” for the participants were as follows: developing an understanding of grammar and its practical implications for writing; identification of problem areas in writing and communication skills; learning to express ideas and thoughts through writing; and learning the importance of cohesion and coherence at the sentence and paragraph level. The “distance mode” aimed to build on these aspects through writing assignments and selected readings. The writing assignments were prepared and readings were chosen by senior faculty consisting of Professors Rama Kant Agnihotri, Nirmala Bellare, Pushpinder Syal, Iqbal Judge and A.L. Khanna. The senior faculty was supported by a junior faculty team from VBERC in particular, Neha Yadav, Arindam and Richa. The assignments were evaluated by the senior and junior faculty collectively. Parul and Preeti from VBERC also helped with the evaluation work.

The participants were given nine writing assignments comprising different tasks. These included reading comprehension; explaining and writing short descriptions; interpreting data; writing a summary, report, proposal or approval writing; text organization with coherence and lexical enrichment. The role of grammatical accuracy in writing cannot be overlooked. So, in addition to the writing tasks, each assignment had a section on grammar. Aspects of grammar included in these assignments were: a) art of persuasion; b) usage of: however, then, and, therefore, it, articles (a, the), connectors (and, but, or) and prepositions; c) identification of prepositional phrases, capital letters, punctuations, similes, metaphors and analogies, auxiliary verbs; and d) sentence construction.

Three writing assignments were assigned in a month which the participants had to complete within a given timeframe. The time allotted for each assignment was one week from the time it was uploaded. The assignments were uploaded on an online group (thdc@vidyabhawan.org) of which all participants were members. The participants had to download the assignments, solve them and e-mail the answers to the course co-coordinator. For individual queries, the participants were free to contact Professor Rama Kant Agnihotri or the course co-coordinator or post their queries on the group, which they did on several occasions.

On receiving the answers, the coordinator circulated them among the resource team for evaluation. To maintain consistency in evaluation, a model answer key was prepared for each assignment. The assignments were evaluated independently by a senior and a junior resource person. Every junior resource person was paired with a senior resource person who acted as a

mentor for him / her. Although the marks were awarded by the senior resource person, the comments of the junior resource person were also taken into consideration. Further, working with the senior resource person was a learning experience for the junior resource person. Upon the completion of checking, both senior and junior resource persons returned the assignments to the co-coordinator who, after noting all the marks and comments, e-mailed the assignments along with the model answers to the participants.

All the participants submitted their assignments; the responses received from them were very encouraging. Also, most of the assignments were submitted on time. In case of a delay, the participants informed the concerned authorities in advance and also made use of the ways mentioned earlier to clear their doubts. Currently, the evaluation of assignment 7 is in progress and the remaining assignments will be done in the next few days.

The process of assessment and certification will commence after the completion of evaluation. The assessment will be cumulative. The total marks obtained by each participant will be converted to a grade and a certificate will be issued. Assessment will not merely involve grading and certification, but also individual profiling and an end line examination, both of which will play a role in future planning of the participants' careers. The individual profile for each participant will comprise marks as well as feedback given to him / her in each assignment, thus giving the organization an idea of how the participant has progressed throughout the program. To assess how well each participant has assimilated the goals of the program explained in the first paragraph, THDC has proposed that they take an end line test which has questions of the type described in the assignments. The analyses of the results of this test will be compared to that of the baseline test

taken at the beginning of the program. This will be done to determine whether the participants' writing competencies have changed during the program and to explore avenues for further improvement. This will be helpful in keeping a record of improvement in their writing skills and also set a platform for future planning.

This workshop has been a great learning experience for Vidya Bhawan Education Resource Centre (VBERC). VBERC generally works at the school level, participating in curriculum planning, materials and teacher training. Now we have learnt how to organize a workshop pitched at academically advanced levels in language where the target audience consists of highly qualified engineers and managers.