

Reports

Report on the Techno-Commercial Writing Workshop for Tehri Hydro Development Corporation Limited Executives

Vidya Bhawan Society, Udaipur

17-26 November 2014

Tehri Hydro Development Corporation India Limited (THDCIL) signed an MOU with Vidya Bhawan Society (VBS), Udaipur to enhance the advanced level writing skills of the Executives of THDCIL, particularly in the field of hydroelectric power. The programme had two components: a “contact period” consisting of a 10 day workshop at Vidya Bhawan Education Resource Centre (VBERC) and “distance mode” in which the participants will have nine writing assignments and some reading assignments to be done over a period of three months starting 15 December, 2014. In this report, we shall focus only on the workshop, which was held from 17 to 26 November 2014 at VBERC, Udaipur.

The workshop was conducted by the senior faculty consisting of Professors Nirmala Bellare, Pushinder Syal, Iqbal Judge and Rama Kant Agnihotri. Important inputs were received from Dr A L Khanna and Prof H K Dewan. The VBERC team, in particular, Neha Yadav, Priyanka Tak and Ashutosh helped with the academic and logistic arrangements.

The workshop was attended by 28 THDCIL executives (including managers, engineers, finance executives, public relation officers and geologists), and was facilitated by the VBERC team led by four senior resource persons. Various modes of transaction such as discussions, reading, activities based on handouts, individual and group work, etc., were followed in the sessions. The proceedings started with the determination of the base line of the participants’ level of the English language using the “Cloze Procedure” (for measuring overall proficiency), writing, reading comprehension and

error spotting exercises. As an outcome of this, the participants were categorized as very good, good, average and those who need intensive help. Participants belonging to the last category were given extra attention with regard to their writing. It was clear that they needed help in several areas of language such as acceptable use of articles, subject-verb agreement, correct use of appropriate voice, prepositions, clauses, phrases etc. They also seemed to have major problems with sentence structure, text coherence and cohesive devices; writing and editing proposals; approvals; note-sheets; memos; reports; summary writing and data interpretation.

The primary focus of the workshop was on involving the participants in different kinds of writing tasks that were part of their day-to-day work. They were provided with a reading text and assigned tasks that involved a clear understanding of the text. The assumption was that reading critically is an important input into writing well. The participants, individually or in groups, were assigned sentences or paragraphs to examine different aspects of grammar such as subject-verb agreement, nouns, verbs, adjectives, clauses, phrases, prepositions and articles. They were given activities such as making plurals based on sounds and changing the voice of the sentences and then asked to frame the rules for making plurals and changing voice. In the case of group activities, all groups presented their results, whereas for individual activities, only some participants presented. This allowed the participants to get a better understanding of several crucial concepts in language. They began to appreciate that language is rule governed; sentences can be infinitely long; a small set of rules produces an infinite number of sentences; the subject in a sentence can comprise one word or a phrase; verbs can be of three types, namely, intransitive, transitive and ditransitive; there must be a subject in a sentence and it must agree with the verb; there are definite rules for making

negatives and yes-no and wh- questions, etc.

The participants did several tasks involving data interpretation, writing and editing proposals, approvals, note-sheets, memos, reports, summary, etc. In all these tasks, the emphasis was on accuracy, coherence and cohesion. This was followed by a discussion on topic and subordinate statements and the use of non-ambiguous sentences to develop a comprehensive understanding of the subject being discussed. The participants were divided into groups and given various types of graphs including line graphs (storage, stream flow and Labov' diagrams of the New York speech); bar graphs (average power production expense) and pie charts to interpret. After the exercise, the participants recognized that while interpreting data, both "inference" and "interpretation" take place simultaneously. Also, one needs to ensure that all aspects of the data are covered, that there is synergy between the data and its interpretation, and that this is reflected in their reports.

Handouts and visual aids were used for writing and editing assignments. These assignments included:

- writing samples of proposals for improvement and rewriting
- identifying the sentences in an approval letter that justify the approval, i.e. "what you are asking the approval for" and writing a reply stating the reasons for approving or rejecting the same
- making a power point presentation on the components and process of report writing followed report writing assignments (e.g. write a report on the reasons for less generation of Hydroelectric Power and give the suggestions for increasing it)
- a discussion on the attributes of a good summary and summary writing.

The participants were provided ample opportunities to write, rewrite and rectify their proposals and approvals. Reworking on the writing assignments was followed by individual

feedback from the faculty and a discussion around some commonly made errors. These activities enabled the participants to monitor their progress in writing. Many of them could notice the trajectory of their progress from the first day to the last.

A significant component of the programme will be conducted in the distance and self-study mode. To equip the participants to handle this, there was a discussion on types of reading (skimming and scanning); how to remember and comprehend a text; and do's and don'ts while reading (e.g. do silent reading, do not read one word at a time, read in chunks and move backward and forward). To consolidate the learning from the assignments, participants were given reading assignments (e.g. text on gravity and corrosion). The participants went over the assignments individually and submitted a summary.

The learning from all these activities will be consolidated in the distance mode through a series of writing and reading assignments over the next three months. Three writing assignments (reading comprehension, data interpretation, summary, proposal, approval and report writing) will be assigned in a month. The participants will have to complete these assignments and submit them for grading within a stipulated time. The participants asked for reference material especially on prepositions and articles; we will try to provide some relevant material.

The participants said that the major outcomes of the workshop for them included: an understanding of grammar and its practical implications for writing; identification of the problem areas in their writing and communication skills; learning to express their ideas and thoughts through writing; and learning the importance of cohesion and coherence at the sentence and paragraph level.

At the end of the workshop, a tentative schedule of the distance mode was shared with the participants.

VBERC Team