Cheat Sheet Module 4

Summary

The Power of Information

Business communication is integral in the workplace, emphasizing the importance of effective research to boost both communication quality and credibility. Various forms of business reports, classified into analytical and informational, serve distinct purposes within an organization. Analytical reports aid decision-making processes by providing data-driven insights and recommendations, focusing on addressing specific decisions or actions. Informational reports are more about disseminating pertinent organizational happenings in a concise format, similar to memos or newsletters but with more focused data presentation.

Effective report writing requires accuracy, brevity, and a clear focus on aiding decision-making without overloading with unnecessary details. Decision-making should not always wait for perfect information, suggesting a balance between speed and accuracy is crucial. Business reports typically include both internal and external data, ranging from financials and employee demographics to industry size and client lists. They integrate qualitative data (like case studies or descriptions) and quantitative data (like financial figures), which are essential for providing a comprehensive view of the business landscape. This blend helps in crafting reports that are not only informative but also actionable, making them valuable tools for both seasoned professionals and those new to business communications.

Internal Data Sources

Primary sources, like eyewitness accounts and experiments, provide firsthand evidence about events and are used internally within organizations for business analysis. Internal data, such as HR turnover reports or financial statements, are vital for creating business reports but generally remain confidential unless disclosure is mandated, as in the case of public companies. The collection of such data involves ethical and political considerations, as accessing sensitive organizational information can affect employee morale and security.

In social science research, access and ethical considerations are crucial. Anthropologists may immerse themselves in communities for direct observation, while sociologists often use surveys, which must be carefully designed to avoid bias. In business, simple survey methods on a Likert scale are recommended to ensure data is representative and minimally biased, highlighting the importance of ethical considerations in data collection and analysis.

Search Techniques

In conducting research, starting with a clear and specific research question is fundamental to developing an effective strategy. A well-defined question sets the boundaries for your inquiry and determines the relevance of secondary sources, which are typically your initial research focus. If these sources sufficiently address your query, you can often bypass the more time-consuming primary research. This efficiency in sourcing secondary materials accelerates the overall research process, making it easier to compile your findings into a report.

When it comes to finding sources, leveraging tools like Google Scholar and various library databases is crucial. However, for many business-related topics, simple Google searches can suffice if you refine your search techniques. Using advanced search features, Boolean operators, and specific search parameters like site domain restrictions or file types can significantly enhance the relevance and credibility of your results. Additionally, keeping track of your sources for citation is important as it adds legitimacy and accountability to your work.

Beyond general internet searches, accessing databases through institutional subscriptions provides a gateway to a plethora of academic and professional journals. Databases not only offer a wide range of materials but also feature controlled subject headings that aid in precise searching. By following bibliographic links and citation tracking tools, researchers can extend their exploration based on previously cited works, uncovering more relevant sources that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Evaluating Information Sources

Information literacy is the ability to recognize the need for information and the capability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the necessary information. The 7 Pillars of Information Literacy aids in conducting thorough and effective research. These pillars include identifying the needed information, assessing knowledge gaps, planning data retrieval, gathering and evaluating data, managing information responsibly, and presenting the knowledge gained. This framework not only assists in structuring research but also in evaluating one's skills and identifying areas for improvement, which is particularly useful when primary research like surveys or fieldwork is needed.

The significance of evaluating information sources has increased due to the prevalence of contested information, making source evaluation a critical aspect of critical thinking and effective communication. The evaluation of websites involves checking the credibility of the URL, understanding the type of website, and discerning the main purpose of the content. Furthermore, understanding and acknowledging bias in sources, a concept known as "bracketing," is crucial in presenting balanced research. The CRAAP Analysis method—evaluating Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose—is a common approach to assess both print and digital media.

Incorporating sources into writing involves quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing. Each method requires proper citation to acknowledge the original author. The use of sources should support claims or arguments made in writing, adhering to scholarly and professional standards. Effective incorporation of sources mimics how one might reference information in conversation, enhancing the reader's understanding and appreciation of the material.

Ethical Use of Information

Professional integrity is essential in both academic and business contexts, emphasized by the application of standards like the CRAAP Test, which ensures the credibility of sources. Maintaining honesty and diligence in one's work is crucial for earning the trust of decision-makers and colleagues. It involves adhering to the highest ethical standards, including proper citation and safeguarding sensitive information, to prevent others from questioning one's conduct.

Avoiding plagiarism is a critical aspect of professional integrity, necessitating diligent research, sufficient writing and revision time, and accurate attribution of sources. While academic writing requires strict adherence to specific citation styles such as APA, MLA, or the Chicago Manual of Style, business writing may allow more flexibility depending on organizational norms. Regardless, the principle of attribution is central in both settings, ensuring respect for intellectual contributions and maintaining ethical standards.

Key Terms

7 Pillars of Information Literacy

a framework for effective research, involving identifying information needs, assessing knowledge gaps, planning and gathering data, evaluating sources and processes, managing information ethically, and presenting findings effectively

analytical reports

a type of report used to help make a decision

Boolean operator

a word or symbol used in search queries to combine or exclude keywords, typically including "AND," "OR," and "NOT."

bracketing

reviewing and gaining awareness around your preconceived beliefs about a given topic before pursuing further study

citation

a reference to the source of information used in a text; included for giving credit to the original authors, supporting claims made in the paper, and allowing readers to verify the information

citation style

a set of rules and conventions used to format and acknowledge the sources of information and ideas in academic writing

CRAAP analysis

a method for evaluating the reliability of sources based on five criteria: **C**urrency (timeliness of the information), **R**elevance (importance of the information to your needs), **A**uthority (source credibility), **A**ccuracy (truthfulness and correctness of the content), and **P**urpose (reason the information exists)

database

an organized collection of data, typically stored and accessed electronically from a computer system

information literacy

the ability to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the needed information

informational report

a type of report used to inform people about something of importance

internal data

data about your organization derived from internal primary sources

Likert scale

a survey tool that asks people to rate their level of agreement with statements, typically on a scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"

metadata

information that describes other data, like a summary or a label, telling you what the data is about, when it was made, or who made it

paraphrase

say something in your own words that someone else has said or written

paywall

a system that prevents internet users from accessing webpage content without a paid subscription

plagiarism

the act of using someone else's work or ideas without giving them proper credit, presenting it as if it were your own

primary research

involves gathering new data firsthand for a specific purpose

primary source

a direct or firsthand evidence about an event, object, or person

qualitative data

generally data that is non-numeric and requires context, time, or variance to have meaning or utility

quantitative data

numeric data

quotations

words and phrases that are taken directly from another source and then used word-for-word in your text

secondary research

involves analyzing existing information that has already been collected by others

secondary sources

sources that analyze, review, or summarize information in primary resources or other secondary resources

summarize

briefly tell the main points of something, leaving out the details