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Semester: Autumn 2026

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ALLAMA IQBAL OPEN UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD

Course: Basics of Technical English (1425) • Level: BA/BS

Semester: Autumn 2026

Assignment No. 2 (Units 6–9)

Total Marks: 100 • Pass Marks: 50

SOLVED ASSIGNMENT GUIDE

(For Study & Reference)

Note: This guide is prepared for study and reference purposes. Students are advised to read the relevant units of the course book, understand the concepts, and write the assignment in their own words. Do not copy verbatim.

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Question 1: Principles of Effective Page Design (20 Marks)

Q.1 Page design is an important element of technical communication. Discuss the major principles of effective page design and evaluate how layout, spacing, headings, and organization contribute to readability and communication effectiveness. (20)

Introduction

Readers judge a technical document before they read a word of it. A page that looks crowded, uneven and endless warns the reader that the information inside will be equally hard work, while a page with a clear heading structure, comfortable margins and well-placed white space

invites reading and promises order. Page design is therefore not the decoration applied after writing is finished; it is part of the communication itself, because design is how a document shows its structure, guides the reader's eye and signals what matters most. In technical communication, where documents are used to perform tasks, find facts quickly and take decisions, good design is a practical necessity rather than an aesthetic luxury. This answer discusses the major principles of effective page design and evaluates how layout, spacing, headings and organization each contribute to readability and overall communication effectiveness.

Major Principles of Effective Page Design

The first principle is balance: the distribution of text, headings, graphics and empty space so that the page looks stable and neither top-heavy nor crowded in one corner. Closely related is proportion — the pleasing and functional relationship between the sizes of elements, so that headings are visibly larger than body text and important items occupy more space than minor ones. Contrast is the principle that makes structure visible: differences in size, weight, colour and spacing distinguish headings from text, warnings from ordinary information and captions from body matter; without contrast everything looks equally important, which is the same as saying nothing looks important. Unity or consistency requires that similar elements look similar throughout the document — the same heading styles, list formats, margins and terminology — so that the reader learns the system once and trusts it on every page.

Two further principles govern how the eye moves. Emphasis ensures that the most important information — the main heading, the warning, the key figure — is encountered first and

remembered, through position, size or highlighting used sparingly. And white space, the deliberate empty area around text and graphics, is not wasted space at all: it separates ideas, rests the eye and marks the boundaries between sections. Finally, alignment and proximity apply the psychology of grouping: items that belong together are placed together and aligned to an invisible grid, while unrelated items are separated, because readers automatically assume that things placed close together are related. A designer who violates proximity — placing a caption nearer the wrong diagram, for example — creates errors without writing a single wrong word.

Layout and Its Contribution to Readability

Layout is the arrangement of all elements on the page or screen: where headings sit, how many columns are used, where graphics are placed, and how margins frame the content. A sound layout puts the most-needed information where readers look for it — titles and main headings at the top, steps in reading order, summaries before detail in reports — and keeps line length moderate, since very long lines tire the eye and cause readers to lose their place, while very short lines fragment sentences. Layout also decides the relationship between text and graphics: a table or diagram placed beside the paragraph that discusses it is understood at once, while the same graphic dumped in an appendix forces the reader to hunt. In evaluating layout, the test is always functional: can a reader who opens the document at any point tell within seconds where he is, what this page is about and where to go next? A layout that passes that test converts reading from a search into a journey along a marked road; a layout that fails it makes even short documents feel long.

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Spacing and Its Contribution to Readability

Spacing operates at three levels. Between lines, generous line spacing lets the eye track from the end of one line to the start of the next and gives the page an open, approachable texture; cramped lines merge visually and slow reading. Between paragraphs and around headings, space is punctuation at the level of the page: a larger gap before a heading than after it attaches the heading to the text that follows, and a clear gap between sections tells the reader one idea has ended and another begun, without a word being written. Within lists and tables, spacing separates items so each can be read and checked off individually — vital in procedures and checklists, where merging two steps visually can merge them in action. The evaluation is straightforward: documents with planned spacing are measurably faster to scan, easier to review and less tiring over long sittings, while densely packed pages provoke the most common reader response of all — postponement. A report nobody starts has a communication effectiveness of zero, whatever it contains.

Headings and Their Contribution to Effectiveness

Headings are the document's navigation system and its summary in miniature. A hierarchy of heading levels — main, sub and minor — shows the reader the whole architecture at a glance, especially when gathered into a table of contents. Informative headings that state content ('Installing the Battery', 'Causes of Overheating') let readers predict what follows, decide what to read, skip and return to, and find a remembered fact again in seconds; vague headings ('General Discussion', 'Other Points') perform none of these services. In task documents, numbered steps and question-style headings ('What should I do if the alarm sounds?') match

the reader's own way of searching. The contribution to effectiveness is largest under real conditions of use: technical documents are rarely read once from cover to cover; they are consulted, searched and re-entered, and headings are what make such use possible. A heading system is thus a promise — each heading promises that the text below is about exactly this — and documents that keep those promises earn the reader's trust in everything else they say.

Organization and Overall Communication Effectiveness

Underlying all visual choices is organization: the logical order of content itself. Design cannot rescue disorganized material, but it can reveal good organization so clearly that the reader feels its logic — overviews before details, prerequisites before procedures, findings before recommendations, familiar before unfamiliar. Devices such as introductions, transitional sentences, summaries, consistent numbering and cross-references work with layout and headings to make one coherent path through the material. When design and organization agree, the effects multiply: readers locate information faster, comprehend more at first reading, remember more afterwards, make fewer errors in acting on instructions, and rate the issuing organization as more competent and trustworthy. When they disagree — attractive pages wrapped around chaotic content — the reader's initial confidence collapses all the faster for having been raised.

Table 1: Design elements and their contribution

Element	What It Does	Effect on the Reader
Layout	Arranges text, headings and graphics on the page	Reader sees where things are and what to read first
Spacing / white space	Separates lines, paragraphs, sections and items	Faster scanning, less fatigue, clear boundaries between ideas

Headings	Name and rank every section	Navigation, prediction, quick retrieval of facts
Consistency & contrast	Makes similar things look similar; important things stand out	Reader learns the system once and trusts it throughout
Organization	Orders content logically and signposts it	Comprehension, memory and confidence in the document

Conclusion

In conclusion, effective page design rests on balance, proportion, contrast, unity, emphasis, alignment and the intelligent use of white space. Layout arranges information where readers can find and follow it, spacing separates and rests the eye at line, paragraph and section level, headings provide navigation and honest summaries of structure, and organization gives the whole document a logic that design makes visible. Each element contributes directly to readability, and readability is the gateway to every other communication goal — understanding, retention, correct action and trust. Technical writers should therefore treat design as part of authorship, planned from the first draft rather than applied to the last one: in technical communication, how a page looks is inseparable from what it says.

Question 2: Graphs, Charts and Tables in Technical Communication (20 Marks)

Q.2 Technical documents often combine written explanations with graphical representations of data. Discuss the role of graphs, charts, and tables in technical communication and evaluate how effective visual presentation improves communication effectiveness and information retention. (20)

Introduction

A page of prose can state that sales rose, fell and rose again; a single line graph shows the same story — its size, its timing and its turning points — before the reader has finished one sentence. Technical communication deals heavily in quantities, comparisons, trends and structures, and for such material words alone are often the slowest and least accurate vehicle available. That is why professional documents systematically combine written explanation with visual presentation: graphs, charts and tables that display data in forms the eye and memory handle far better than paragraphs of figures. This answer discusses the distinct role of each visual form, the rules that make visuals honest and effective, and then evaluates how effective visual presentation improves communication effectiveness and information retention.

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The Role of Tables

Tables arrange exact values in rows and columns so that readers can look up a precise figure, compare entries across categories and see several variables at once. Their strength is precision and density: a specification table gives the dimensions, weights and tolerances of six models in the space a paragraph would need for one, and a results table lets an examiner verify the data behind a report's conclusions. Tables serve reference use best — the reader arrives with a question ('What is the maximum load of Model C?') and leaves with an exact answer. Good tables require clear titles, labelled rows and columns with units stated, consistent decimal places and alignment, and no more columns than the reader can hold in view; a table that needs its own instruction manual has failed. Tables are the weakest form for showing

movement over time, however, because the pattern hidden in forty numbers is invisible until someone plots it.

The Role of Graphs and Charts

Graphs and charts trade a little precision for a great deal of pattern. Line graphs show trends and changes over time — temperature during a process, monthly production, a patient's readings — and make rises, falls, fluctuations and turning points immediately visible. Bar charts compare quantities between categories: output of four factories, marks of five subjects, costs of three suppliers. Pie charts show parts of a single whole, such as the share of a budget spent under each head, and are honest only when the parts genuinely sum to one hundred percent. Flowcharts display the steps and decisions of a process, organizational charts show reporting structures, and pictorial diagrams and drawings show what objects look like and how parts fit together — information prose conveys clumsily at any length. The writer's skill lies in matching form to message: trend to line, comparison to bars, share to pie, process to flow, exact values to table. Choosing the wrong form is not a neutral error; a pie chart of values that are not parts of a whole actively teaches a falsehood.

Visuals also perform roles beyond displaying numbers. They summarize: an executive who reads one chart absorbs the quarter's position. They persuade honestly: a safety chart of falling accident rates after a new procedure argues more powerfully than the same claim in prose. They warn: colour and position can flag the one figure that exceeds its limit. And they support readers across language barriers, since a well-designed diagram is often clearer to a second-

language reader than the paragraph it accompanies — one reason visuals are central to international technical documentation.

Rules for Effective Visual Presentation

- Every visual must have a number and a clear, informative title ('Figure 2: Monthly attendance, January–June'), and must be referred to and explained in the text; a visual the text ignores is decoration, not communication.
- Axes, columns and segments must be labelled, with units and sources stated, so the visual can be checked and believed.
- Scales must be honest: a truncated or stretched axis that exaggerates a small difference is a visual lie, and technical communication depends on the trust such tricks destroy.
- One visual, one message: cluttered charts carrying six messages carry none; separate them or simplify.
- Colour and highlighting must be used sparingly and meaningfully — to distinguish categories or flag the key value — and must still work for readers who print in black and white or have colour-vision deficiency.
- Visuals must be placed close to the discussion they support and sized so that labels remain legible at the document's real reading size.

How Visual Presentation Improves Effectiveness and Retention

The improvement works through well-understood features of how people process information. First, pattern recognition is fast and pre-verbal: the eye detects that one bar towers over others or that a line turns sharply at March before conscious reading begins, so the main message

arrives even for a reader who only glances — and in busy organizations, the glancing reader is the majority. Second, visuals reduce cognitive load: comparisons that would require holding six figures in memory while mentally subtracting become a single look, freeing the reader's attention for interpretation and decision rather than arithmetic. Third, dual presentation — the same content in words and in a visual — gives memory two routes to store and retrieve it, which is why readers reliably recall the chart from a report long after its paragraphs have faded; retention improves because the visual provides a mental picture to which the verbal explanation stays attached.

Fourth, visuals improve decision quality: trends expose problems early, comparisons make options genuinely comparable, and honest graphics resist the selective emphasis that prose permits, since a chart shows the bad month alongside the good ones. Fifth, visuals travel across audiences: managers, technicians and the public can each take from one chart the level of detail they need, especially when a chart is paired with its data table. These gains, however, are conditional. A misleading scale, an unlabelled axis, a decorative image or a chart whose point is never stated in the text will reduce effectiveness below what plain prose would have achieved, because readers trust visuals quickly and remember them longest — including when they are wrong. The power that makes graphics valuable makes careless graphics dangerous.

Table 1: Choosing the right visual form

Purpose	Best Form	Example
Show change over time	Line graph	Monthly production over one year
Compare quantities across categories	Bar chart	Output of four regional offices
Show parts of one whole	Pie chart	Shares of the annual budget
Give exact values for reference	Table	Specifications of six machine

		models
Show steps and decisions in a process	Flowchart	Complaint-handling procedure
Show structure and reporting lines	Organizational chart	Department hierarchy

Conclusion

In conclusion, graphs, charts and tables are not illustrations added to technical documents but working instruments with distinct roles: tables provide exact, look-up values; line graphs reveal trends; bar and pie charts make comparisons and proportions visible; flowcharts and diagrams explain processes and structures. Used under the rules of honest scaling, clear labelling, textual explanation and fitness of form to message, visual presentation speeds comprehension, reduces the reader's mental effort, supports decisions and markedly improves retention, because a picture is stored in memory alongside the words it explains. The technical writer's task is therefore twofold — to choose the visual form the data deserve, and to design it with the same care as the sentences around it.

Question 3: Professional Communication in Workplace Instructions — The WhatsApp Case (20 Marks)

Q.3 A project manager regularly sends workplace instructions to employees through WhatsApp messages using informal abbreviations, incomplete information, and an inappropriate tone. As a result, employees misunderstand deadlines and assigned responsibilities. Discuss the professional communication principles that should be followed to improve clarity, professionalism, and communication effectiveness. (20)

Introduction

WhatsApp is fast, familiar and already on every employee's phone, which is why managers everywhere have adopted it as a workplace channel. But a channel's convenience does not excuse a message's carelessness. In the situation described, a project manager sends instructions in informal abbreviations, leaves information incomplete and uses an inappropriate tone, and the predictable results follow: employees misunderstand deadlines and are unsure who is responsible for what. Nobody in this story lacks intelligence or goodwill; what is missing is professional communication discipline adapted to an informal medium. This answer analyzes the faults in the manager's practice and discusses the principles — clarity and completeness, appropriate language and tone, structure, confirmation and correct channel use — that should govern workplace instructions so that clarity, professionalism and effectiveness are restored.

What Is Going Wrong

The three faults named in the case each attack a different condition of successful communication. Informal abbreviations ('ASAP', 'pls do the rprt', unexplained short forms and office slang) assume a shared code that may not exist — new staff, staff from other departments and second-language readers decode them differently or not at all, and 'ASAP' in particular has no date in it: to the manager it means today, to the employee it may mean this week. Incomplete information is the most damaging fault: an instruction that names a task but not its owner, its deadline, its standard or its place of delivery is not an instruction but a rumour of one, and it produces either duplication, when two people do the same task, or omission, when each assumes the other is doing it. An inappropriate tone — abrupt, sarcastic,

threatening or over-familiar — adds a third failure: employees spend their attention on the manager's mood and on defending themselves instead of on the task, and they stop asking the clarifying questions that would have exposed the first two faults, because asking feels risky. The misunderstanding of deadlines and responsibilities is thus not an accident but the system working exactly as it was written.

Principle 1: Clarity and Completeness of Content

Every workplace instruction should pass the test of the five questions: What exactly is to be done? Who is responsible — named, not implied? When is it due — a date and time, not 'soon' or 'ASAP'? To what standard or in what format? And where or to whom is the result to be delivered? An instruction containing those five elements can be acted on without a follow-up conversation; one missing any of them manufactures misunderstanding at scale. Clarity also requires one instruction per message where possible, plain words instead of abbreviations, technical terms explained for those who may not know them, and numbers, dates and names written in full and checked before sending, since a transposed digit in a date creates a different deadline entirely. Where a task is complex, the manager should write it as a short numbered list of steps in order, because sequence is information too, and a paragraph of mixed instructions invites employees to complete them in the wrong order or miss the middle one.

Principle 2: Appropriate Language and Professional Tone

Professional tone on WhatsApp is neither stiff officialese nor chat between friends; it is courteous, direct and neutral. It opens with a greeting, states the business plainly, requests rather than commands where a request is what is meant, and closes without sarcasm, blame or

public criticism. CAPITAL LETTERS, strings of exclamation marks and voice notes recorded in anger all read as shouting. Criticism and sensitive matters belong in private conversation, never in a group message, because public correction humiliates, and a humiliated employee learns to avoid the manager, not the mistake. Language must also be inclusive and unambiguous for a mixed workforce: full sentences, standard spelling, no slang or jokes that depend on one culture or one language, and no assumption that because the manager's abbreviation is familiar to him it is familiar to a team he may have managed for only a month.

Principle 3: Structure, Emphasis and Readability on a Small Screen

A phone message is read quickly, often between other tasks, so structure must do in miniature what headings do in a report. The subject or purpose comes first ('Subject: Client presentation file — action by Thursday'), key facts such as dates and names are placed where they cannot be missed, longer instructions are broken into short lines or numbered points, and attachments are named to match their content ('Q3-Budget-Final.xlsx', not 'Document1'). One message should carry one topic: a thread that mixes a deadline, a leave approval and a joke will be searched later for the deadline and not found. These habits cost the sender a minute and save every receiver several — the same economy that governs all good technical writing, applied to a smaller page.

Principle 4: Confirmation, Feedback and Record

An instruction is not communicated when it is sent; it is communicated when it is understood, so professional practice builds confirmation into the process. The manager should ask the responsible employee to acknowledge and, for important tasks, to repeat back the deadline

and deliverable in his own words, which exposes misunderstanding while it is still free to fix. Questions should be explicitly invited ('If anything is unclear, ask here before 2 p.m.'), and progress on multi-day tasks should be checked at stated points rather than discovered at the deadline. Finally, important instructions and decisions must not live only in a chat that scrolls away and can be deleted: they should be confirmed in the organization's durable record — email, task board or project file — both so that absent staff can find them and so that responsibility, when disputes arise, rests on the written word rather than on competing memories of a vanished message.

- Before sending, the manager should re-read the message as a new employee would: Is the task, owner, deadline, standard and delivery point all present? Is every abbreviation explained? Would the tone be acceptable if read aloud in a meeting?
- A corrected version of a typical faulty message shows the difference. Faulty: 'guys finish the rprt asap, someone send to client.' Professional: 'Assalam-o-Alaikum team. Ahmed: please finalize the Q3 progress report (Word file, using the attached template) and send it to me by Thursday, 30 October, 4 p.m. for review. I will forward it to the client on Friday. Please reply to confirm, and ask here if any figure is unclear.' The second message is only slightly longer and removes every ambiguity the case describes.

Choosing the Right Channel and the Right Time

Professional communication also means respecting the limits of the channel. WhatsApp suits quick coordination, reminders and short instructions; it does not suit lengthy procedures, confidential matters, formal approvals or anything an employee must be able to retrieve

months later, and a manager who forces all communication through it guarantees both confusion and resentment. Timing is part of professionalism as well: routine instructions sent late at night or on rest days blur the boundary between work and rest, train employees to ignore messages as noise, and should be reserved for genuine emergencies, clearly marked as such. Consistency matters too — if instructions come sometimes by WhatsApp, sometimes by email and sometimes verbally in a corridor, no employee can know where the authoritative version lives. One agreed channel per type of communication, used consistently, is itself a clarity device.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the failures in this case — misunderstood deadlines and confused responsibilities — arise from identifiable faults: abbreviations that assume a shared code, instructions missing their owner, deadline, standard or destination, and a tone that discourages questions. The remedies are the classic principles of professional and technical communication applied to a modern channel: complete content answering what, who, when, to what standard and to whom; plain, courteous and inclusive language; small-screen structure with the purpose first; deliberate confirmation and feedback; a durable record of important decisions; and the right channel used at the right time. WhatsApp does not need to be abandoned — it needs to be professionalized. A manager's messages are the team's picture of the organization's standards, and every clear message sent is also a lesson in how to write one.

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Question 4: Communication Skills and Professional Behaviour in a Job Interview (20 Marks)

Q.4 You are applying for a technical position in a software company and have been invited for an interview. Discuss the communication skills, interview practices, and professional behavior that should be followed to create a positive impression during the interview. (20)

Introduction

An interview for a technical position in a software company is two examinations at once. The first tests technical competence — programming knowledge, problem-solving, familiarity with tools and projects. The second, which runs continuously from the first handshake to the final goodbye, tests communication: whether this person can explain a technical idea to a non-technical manager, listen carefully enough to answer the question actually asked, disagree without arrogance, admit ignorance without panic and represent the company credibly to a client. Software is built by teams and sold to clients, so employers treat the interview itself as a sample of the candidate's future communication at work. This answer discusses the communication skills, interview practices and professional behaviour that create a positive impression, organized into preparation, performance during the interview, and conduct at its close.

Before the Interview: Preparation as Communication

A positive impression begins days earlier. The candidate should research the company — its products, clients, technologies and recent work — so that answers can be connected to the

employer's real needs instead of floating in generalities, and should re-read the job description to identify which of his skills answer which requirement. He should prepare structured accounts of his projects and experience using a simple situation–action–result pattern: what the problem was, what he personally did, and what outcome followed, with honest numbers where he has them. Anticipated questions — 'Tell us about yourself', 'Your strengths and weaknesses', 'A difficult bug or conflict and how you handled it' 'Why this company?' — should be rehearsed aloud, because an answer composed silently in the head often dissolves when spoken under pressure. Practical preparation is communication too: confirmed time and place or tested video link, camera and microphone checked, documents and portfolio ready, professional dress chosen, and arrival planned early — ten minutes early for an in-person interview, a few minutes early online — since lateness announces, before a word is spoken, how the candidate will treat deadlines.

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Verbal Communication Skills During the Interview

The core verbal skill is listening. A candidate should let each question finish, pause briefly to think, and answer the question that was asked — not the one he wishes had been asked or the one he prepared for yesterday. Answers should be organized: a short direct answer first, then supporting detail, then a stop. Rambling is the most common verbal failure; interviewers who must interrupt learn that the candidate cannot judge an audience, a fatal impression for someone who will write documentation and explain systems. Technical explanations deserve special care: define terms before building on them, move from the simple picture to the detail, use a concrete example from real work, and check the listener's level — explaining a database

design identically to a fellow engineer and to an HR manager shows technical knowledge and communicative failure at the same time.

Honesty about limits is a communication skill, not a confession. Faced with an unknown technology, the strong answer names what is known, relates the unknown to something similar, and describes how it would be learned: 'I have not used that framework in production; I have built similar work in X, and my first step would be…' Interviewers, who can detect bluffing in their own field instantly, trust candidates who mark the boundary of their knowledge accurately because that is exactly the behaviour they need in project estimates and status reports. Questions the candidate asks are equally revealing: thoughtful questions about the team's projects, development process, mentoring and success criteria signal genuine interest and professional seriousness, while asking only about salary and holidays at the first opportunity signals the opposite — those matters belong to the offer stage or the closing minutes, raised politely.

Non-Verbal Communication and Professional Behaviour

Before and beneath words, behaviour speaks. A firm but natural greeting, eye contact distributed among all interviewers, an upright and attentive posture, and a phone switched off and out of sight all communicate respect and self-command. Nervous habits — interrupting, fidgeting, staring at the table, checking a watch — contradict confident words, and interviewers believe the contradiction. In video interviews the equivalents are looking at the camera when speaking, a quiet and tidy background, and not typing or reading messages during the conversation. Professional behaviour includes how the candidate speaks about others: criticism

of a former employer, teacher or team is always a mistake, because the listener reasonably assumes the same will one day be said about this company; disagreements and failures should be described factually, with the candidate's own part owned and the lesson stated.

Courtesy extends to everyone encountered — reception staff, the person who offers water, junior panel members — because companies notice how a candidate treats people who cannot affect the decision, and because in a small industry today's reception contact is tomorrow's colleague. Cultural and organizational fit is also communicated quietly: punctuality, modest and tidy dress appropriate to the company's norms, respectful forms of address, and patience with delays or technical problems during the process all demonstrate the emotional steadiness that teamwork requires.

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Table 1: Interview communication — practices that help and habits that harm

Do	Avoid
Listen fully, pause, answer the question asked	Interrupting, or answering a different question
Structure answers: point, evidence, result	Rambling narratives with no conclusion
Admit limits honestly and show how you would learn	Bluffing about unfamiliar technology
Explain technical ideas at the listener's level	Jargon used to impress rather than inform
Ask thoughtful questions about the work and team	Asking only about pay and holidays at the outset
Speak factually and fairly about past employers	Criticizing former employers, teachers or colleagues
Arrive early, dress professionally, phone off	Arriving late, casual dress, phone visible or ringing

Closing the Interview and Following Up

The ending is part of the examination. When invited to add anything, the candidate should briefly restate his strongest matching strength and his genuine interest in the role, thank the panel for their time, and confirm the next step and its expected timing rather than leaving the

room in uncertainty. A short, professional thank-you email the same day — thanking the interviewers, recalling one specific point discussed, and restating interest in two or three sentences — keeps the candidate's name positively present and demonstrates, one last time, exactly the written communication the job will require. If the answer is eventually no, a gracious reply preserves the relationship; software communities are small, and a candidate remembered for professionalism is considered again when the next position opens.

Conclusion

To conclude, a positive interview impression for a technical position is built on preparation that connects the candidate's evidence to the employer's needs, on verbal skills of listening, structured and honest answering, and explanation pitched to the listener, and on professional behaviour — punctuality, courtesy, self-command and fair speech about others — that lets interviewers picture the candidate working in their team and facing their clients. Technical knowledge gets a candidate invited; communication decides whether he is hired, because the interview is not merely about the work — to the employer, it is a working demonstration of it.

Question 5: Formal Request Letter for an Extension of the Report Submission Date (20 Marks)

Q.5 You are part of a university research team preparing a technical report for an industry-sponsored project. Due to technical problems and incomplete survey responses, the report cannot be completed before the submission deadline next week, although most of the work has

already been finished. Write a formal request letter to the project supervisor explaining the situation and requesting an extension for the submission date. (20)

Introduction

Requesting an extension is a normal professional act, but it must be done in a way that protects the team's credibility: early rather than at the deadline, in writing rather than verbally, honestly about the causes, specific about the new date requested, and reassuring about the work already completed and the plan for finishing. A letter that merely asks for 'more time' invites refusal; a letter that shows a nearly finished report, genuine obstacles beyond the team's control, and a realistic revised schedule gives the supervisor — who must in turn answer to the industry sponsor — everything needed to say yes and to defend that yes. Below, the situation is first set out briefly, then the formal letter is written in full in the standard business format, and finally the features that make the letter effective are explained. The names, dates and figures in the letter are illustrative and should be adapted to the real case.

The Letter

[ILLUSTRATIVE MODEL — Names, dates and details are illustrative and should be replaced with the actual particulars.]

From: Ahmed Raza, Team Leader, University Research Team, Department of Computer Science. To: Dr. Sarah Khan, Project Supervisor, Industry-Sponsored Research Project. Date: 23 October 2026. Subject: Request for Extension of Submission Date for the Technical Report on the Industry-Sponsored Project — Revised Date Proposed: 6 November 2026.

Dear Dr. Khan,

I am writing on behalf of our research team to request an extension of the submission date for the technical report on the industry-sponsored project, 'Evaluating the Performance of the Automated Inventory System', which is currently due on Friday, 30 October 2026. We respectfully request that the deadline be extended by one week, to Friday, 6 November 2026, for the reasons explained below. We are sorry for the inconvenience this request may cause and assure you that it is made only because submitting on the original date would compromise the accuracy and completeness of the report.

Most of the work has already been completed. The literature review, system testing, data analysis of the responses received, and the first full draft of five of the six chapters are finished, and the draft has been reviewed internally by the team. Two difficulties, however, prevent us from completing the report responsibly by 30 October. First, we faced technical problems during the final phase of data collection: the project server remained unavailable for three days last week, and a fault in the data-logging module corrupted part of the performance records, which had to be collected again. Secondly, our survey of system users has received an incomplete response: despite two reminders, we have received 92 of the 150 expected responses, and the missing responses belong mainly to one user group whose results are necessary for a balanced conclusion. The final reminder has already been issued, and the remaining responses are expected within the next few days.

To complete the remaining work, we have prepared the following schedule: receipt and entry of outstanding survey responses by 1 November; completion of the final chapter and revision of the analysis by 3 November; internal review, proofreading and formatting of the complete

report by 5 November; and submission of the final report to your office on 6 November 2026. We will also send you a brief progress update on 2 November so that you remain fully informed, and we are ready to present the completed chapters to you or to the sponsor's representative at any point if interim evidence of progress would be helpful.

We fully understand the importance of the original deadline, particularly because the project is sponsored by industry, and we do not make this request lightly. The additional week will allow us to submit a report that is complete, accurate and worthy of the university and the sponsor, rather than one delivered on time but weakened by missing data. We shall be grateful for your kind approval of this extension and are available to discuss the matter at your convenience. Thank you very much for your guidance and understanding.

Yours sincerely, Ahmed Raza (Team Leader, on behalf of the University Research Team), Department of Computer Science. Enclosures: (1) Progress summary of completed chapters; (2) Revised completion schedule.

Why This Letter Is Written This Way: Features of an Effective Extension Request

Several deliberate features deserve notice, because they are what separate a request that is granted from one that is refused. The subject line itself carries the request and the exact proposed date, so the supervisor knows the whole matter before reading a line. The request is made a full week before the deadline, not on its eve: early warning is itself evidence of professionalism and gives the supervisor time to inform the sponsor calmly. The letter opens with progress before problems — five of six chapters drafted and reviewed — because a request from a team that has demonstrably worked is judged differently from one that may not

have started. The two causes are then stated factually and specifically (server failure and corrupted records; 92 of 150 responses, with the missing group identified) without blaming any person, and each cause is shown to be outside the team's reasonable control while the steps already taken — re-collection, reminders issued — are mentioned, proving the team exhausted its remedies before asking for time.

Equally important, the letter asks for a definite period — one week, to a named date — not an open-ended delay, and supports it with a day-by-day completion schedule and an offer of an interim progress update and interim presentation. This converts the supervisor's decision from an act of faith into an act of management: she can monitor the promise. The tone throughout is courteous and accountable — apology without grovelling, confidence without arrogance — and the letter acknowledges the sponsor's interest explicitly, showing the team understands the supervisor's own position. Finally, the enclosures do persuasive work: attaching the progress summary lets the supervisor verify in two minutes that the claim of near-completion is true, which is worth more than any assurance in the body of the letter.

- Write early, in formal letter format, with a subject line stating the request and the new date proposed.
- Report completed work first and, where possible, attach proof of progress.
- Explain the obstacles specifically and honestly, without blaming individuals, and state the remedies already tried.
- Request a definite, realistic period — neither so short that a second request follows nor so long that urgency disappears.

- Provide a completion schedule and an interim update, accept responsibility, thank the reader, and keep the tone courteous throughout.

Conclusion

To conclude, the letter above fulfils the task set in the question: written by a member of the university research team to the project supervisor, it explains that technical problems and incomplete survey responses make the deadline next week impossible despite most of the work being finished, and it requests a definite extension supported by a completion plan. Its effectiveness rests on the principles of professional communication examined throughout this course — timeliness, honesty, completeness, specific dates and figures, courteous tone and verifiable evidence. An extension requested in this manner does not damage a team's reputation; handled early and transparently, it demonstrates the reliability on which reputations are actually built.

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