

The art of inspectionology

In the last issue, Jerry Tyrell explained how inspecting your work helps achieve the quality you and your client want. In the second part of his 'inspection overview', he covers specialist skills, complex issues and getting essential information from others.

Reporting is the way you combine the written material. Often I read badly structured reports that fail to communicate what is necessary or tell the relevant parties what to do with the information.

The essence of the report is its structure. In this technical age, I summarise everything and present key information clearly in carefully thought-out sections. I use tables, diagrams and available plans with notes. I avoid baggage and unnecessary stuff. Often I don't include photos unless the report is going to court or to someone who has not seen the building.

The main sections I use for complex reports are: Executive Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations, Observations and Appendices.

Important but simpler reports that are going back to subbies and suppliers need only a list of solutions or 'observations'.

Less is more

Please be brief. I don't know why so many tradesmen feel obliged to use a lot of words. Avoid the scourge of apprentice writers who flower their language with useless adjectives.

For example: 'There were runs in the poly type paint coatings applied to some of the doors in the new kitchen where I think the supplier could have done a superior job.'

Are you serious? Why not say: 'Invite kitchen contractor to replace pantry and lower pot doors where coating unsatisfactory.'



When there are lots of observations I use sub-headings to ensure the reader can find the issue quickly. I break up the report into the main areas, such as Interior and Exterior. And in each area I use room or item names such as Kitchen, Bed 4, Garage, Pool, etc.

I always try to leave any reader of my report with certainty about what I'm telling them – or, at the very least, guidance on what to do next to make progress.

Certification by the appropriate person or supplier is a vital part of risk reduction. Let's call these issues requiring certification 'critical' or 'key' work. You probably already get certification from your structural engineer and the termite contractor. However, the list of certificates you should get includes:

Residential

Structural, Hydraulic, Waterproofing, Termite protection, Structural glass, including balustrades, Plumbing, Gas, Electrical, including smoke detectors and safety switches.

Commercial and units

Mechanical, Acoustic, Fire safety including fire doors, Lift, Coatings, Automatic doors and gates.

The list will grow as you realise that everyone shares responsibility for the delivery of reliable quality.

For instance, larger underground car parks will need their basement pumps certified. Of course, certification is useless unless it refers to the documents, relevant Standard and best practice.

If there is any overlap between contractors it is important that you get one of them to take responsibility.

Risk assessment will usually cause the important things to pop up to the top of any list of issues. Good inspectors 'smell' risk.

The symptoms of risk that builders need to identify tend to be the tricky, out of the ordinary things. The ones that trip us up most are:

1. Anything you haven't done a lot of or haven't seen before.
2. Details that you know won't work, eg: balcony eaves without hobs.

Tools of the inspection trade

We don't hesitate buying the latest tools to improve production. The same applies with technical equipment. The main tools building consultants use when inspecting are:

- Strong rechargeable torch (Streamlight – this has lithium ion batteries and back-up LED);
- Level with rotating or digital protractor to measure slope;

- Moisture meter (Protimeter);
- Various measuring tapes and gauges;
- Ladders and harness;
- Digital voice recorder;
- Strong binoculars;
- Camera;
- PPE, such as mask, knee pads and overalls;
- General tools for opening panels and access hatches.

3. Waterproofing where gravity drainage doesn't exist.
 4. Joints between wildly different materials, especially if curves are involved.
 5. Anything big, long and concentrated.
 6. Buildings with multiple uses (residential units plus shops).
- So obviously, you need to apply considerable skills when inspecting complex building work.

The best way to inspect well is to methodically build a body of knowledge of the technical rules and the practical outcomes you should be seeing. Be patient, the knowledge comes.

The craft of inspecting buildings gets easier as your knowledge increases and you gain experience from bigger and more complex projects. I've told you what I know is best practice.

There are hundreds of people masquerading as inspectors, and very few full-time building consultants are really good.

Many of these people didn't know half of what most of you know. Or, if they did, they never refined their skill with commitment and practice.

I hope that over time you all appreciate quality more – and you know how to get it and write about it by using your inspection and reporting skills.

Please email me any thoughts or experiences at jwtyrrell@tyrrells.com ■

Jerry Tyrell is co-founder of Tyrells Property Inspections. He has more than 30 years' experience as a labourer, tradesman, contractor, architect, mediator, building consultant and author.

Next Issue: Principles of fireproof construction

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