



# REPORT WRITING



A report is an objective account of a situation, topic or problem written for a specific audience, and often includes recommendations for solving the identified problems or issues. There are various types of reports which results in some differences in the required structure, thus it is important that you are clear about the nature of your task. Reports can be analytical, informative, integrated, or technical, but all should be logical, clear and accurate.

## HOW DO REPORTS DIFFER FROM ESSAYS?

	PURPOSE	STRUCTURE	FLOW
<b>ESSAYS</b>	Present or argue for a position in a logical development of paragraphs outlining supporting ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Body paragraphs</li> <li>• Conclusion</li> <li>• References</li> </ul>	Reader expected to read from introduction to conclusion
<b>REPORTS</b>	To objectively discuss /analyse a topic, identify issues and suggest solutions or recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Table of Contents lists a series of sections and sub-sections, marked by clear headings and sub-headings (sometimes numbered)</li> <li>• Order of sections is standard (see General Report Structure below this table) but not all may be required in your task</li> <li>• Brief paragraphs, bulleted lists acceptable</li> <li>• Tables and figures often included for efficiency</li> <li>• Recommendations often included</li> </ul>	In professional reports, a reader may read selected relevant sections only, using table of contents to select In university assignments, your assessor will read all sections

## WHEN WRITING A REPORT, ASK YOURSELF:



- What exactly is the report about? What is it designed to achieve? What is its scope or range? What actions might follow from it?
- Is it objective? Are opinions and interpretations appropriate?
- What subject area criteria or views need to be considered?
- Are there any theories, subject bias, ethical views or assumptions that need to be considered?

## BEFORE RESEARCHING

Write a sentence or thesis statement clarifying the subject and purpose of the report. This will be useful when you write your report.

## NEW INFORMATION

Some reports require new information. Plan experiments, interviews, measurements, questionnaires and other research methods carefully. Consider time-lines, length, costs (if applicable), methods and any problems that may arise. Make sure the data will be complete well before the due date of the report. Request help from your lecturer in designing methods and approaches if you are uncertain about these.



## GENERAL REPORT STRUCTURE

The following table indicates the usual order of sections in a report and a brief indication of the information required.

TITLE PAGE	<p><b>Professional reports:</b> Title of report, author's name, date of submission, who report is written for</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Title of report and your usual required information for assignments e.g. Name, student ID etc.</p>
ABSTRACT OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	Summarises aims, findings and recommendations to provide a brief overview of the entire report. This is normally the first section read but must be written last as it covers the full report.
TABLE OF CONTENTS	List of clear headings and sub-headings to enable quick comprehension of content. Include relevant page numbers.
INTRODUCTION	Explains aims, objectives and scope of report in detail. Identifies any limitations.
METHODS & RESULTS (Usually only included in science reports)	Writing a scientific lab report? These reports usually have more specific requirements.
	<div style="border: 2px solid blue; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">SEE THE GUIDE ON WRITING A SCIENTIFIC LAB REPORT</div>
BODY OF REPORT	Discussion of the topic of the report. Use headings and sub-headings for clarity if lengthy discussion is required. Sources should be referenced.
CONCLUSIONS	Highlights the significance of the main points detailed in the body of the report.
RECOMMENDATIONS	Suggestions for improvement of any identified issues. Recommendations may also be combined with discussion in some less traditional report styles.
REFERENCE LIST	List of all sources of information formatted in required referencing style.
APPENDIX/APPENDICES	<p>Contains supporting information that is too detailed for the body of the report.</p> <p>Appendices should be labelled, Appendix A (Title e.g. SA Council Boundaries), Appendix B (Title) etc., and must be referred to in the discussion in the body.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">e.g. See Appendix A for a map of SA council boundaries.</p>



**PLEASE NOTE:** the above is a **general** guide to report structure. Follow the guidelines given by your lecturer and remember to ask for clarification if you are unsure about what is required for your particular task. Many lecturers do not require all of the above sections in their assessment tasks.



## INFORMATION NEEDED

Lecturers requiring written reports normally provide you with the information below:

- The topic or subject of the report
- The required length and due date
- The purpose of the report and its audience
- The required structure: sections to be included and those not required.

Some lecturers also provide a detailed format particular to the field of study, including information about abstracts, summaries, conclusions, recommendations, and how these are to be presented. **Follow your lecturer’s specific requirements.**

Most reports require an impersonal passive style, for example: ‘The statistics were presented to the committee’, rather than ‘I (or we) presented the statistics to the committee’.

If you need to express uncertainty or doubt, you can use the modal verbs ‘may’, ‘might’ or ‘could’, or adverbs such as ‘perhaps’ or ‘possibly’.

You may choose to use tables, graphs and diagrams, if these are appropriate for your topic. These must be labelled clearly and referred to in your text. e.g. Table 1 indicates that ...

## THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

Creating a Table of Contents is an important process in planning and presenting a clear, long report.

- You will need to decide on appropriate headings and sub-headings to lead your reader through your analysis of your report topic.
- Headings and sub-headings should be concise and should clearly indicate the subject of that section.
- If numbering your sections, the Introduction is the first section to be numbered. The first body section will be 2.0, and its sub-sections will be 2.1 and 2.2. Do not go beyond 2 sub-sections under each section, for simplicity.
- Include page numbers with each heading if your report is long.

### FOR EXAMPLE:

#### Table of Contents

<b>1.0 Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.0 Studying overseas .....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 Advantages.....	5
2.1.1 Cross-cultural learning .....	5
2.1.2 Independence .....	5
2.1.3 Broaden networks .....	6
2.2 Disadvantages.....	6
2.2.1 Cultural adjustment .....	7
2.2.2 Isolation .....	7
2.2.3 Homesickness .....	8
<b>3.0 Studying in home country .....</b>	<b>8</b>



## EDITING

It is important that your report is presented in a clear, straightforward manner. Make sure that:

- All data and facts you have presented are accurate.
- Data has been analysed in accordance with your report guidelines.
- Your conclusions and recommendations logically follow on from the data.
- All tables, graphs, diagrams and charts you have used conform to your lecturer's guidelines.
- All references (in-text and reference list) are accurate and complete.
- The word count meets requirements
- You have fully met the requirements for this report.
- You have formatted the document in line with your lecturer's expectations

## PROOFREADING

After editing, proofread your report as you would proofread an essay, checking:

- For spelling, punctuation, grammar and expression mistakes.
- That your headings and sub-headings indicate the content they refer to
- That your sections are in the correct order
- That your Table of Contents list the correct page numbers for the sections
- That all of your sources referred to in your report are in your reference list and are correctly formatted

## PROOFREADING

Brick, J, Herke, M & Wong, D 2016, *Academic culture: a student's guide to studying at university*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, Palgrave MacMillan, South Yarra, Victoria. (in Flinders Library)

Centre for Teaching and Learning, The University of Newcastle 2016, *Report writing*, viewed 3 July 2019, <[https://www.newcastle.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/333773/LD-Report-Writing-LH.pdf](https://www.newcastle.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/333773/LD-Report-Writing-LH.pdf)> (detailed guide on writing the various sections of a report (including examples))

Learning Development, University of Leicester n.d., *Writing reports*, viewed 3 July 2019, <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/writing/writing-resources/reports>

Uni Learning: the University of Wollongong 2000, *Report writing*, viewed 3 July 2019, <<http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/report/1d.html>>. (a guide to language use in report writing)

Winckel, A & Hart, B 2002, *Report writing style guide for engineering students*, 4th edn, University of South Australia Faculty of Engineering, viewed 3 July 2019, <[https://lo.unisa.edu.au/pluginfile.php/1687722/mod\\_resource/content/0/Report%20style%20writing%20guide\\_Engineering.pdf](https://lo.unisa.edu.au/pluginfile.php/1687722/mod_resource/content/0/Report%20style%20writing%20guide_Engineering.pdf)>

Windschuttle, K & Elliot, E 1999, 'Reports: research and analysis', in *Writing, researching, communicating*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, McGraw-Hill, Sydney.