

Report Writing

What is a report?

A report is a written presentation of factual information based on an investigation or research. Reports form the basis for solving problems or making decisions, often in the subjects of business and the sciences. The length of reports varies; there are short memorandum (memo) reports and long reports. Most often you will be asked to write a long report.

What makes an effective report?

- Clear, concise and accurate
- Easy for the audience to understand
- Appropriate for the audience
- Well organised with clear section headings

Report structure:

Reports follow a standardised format. This allows the reader to find the information easily and focus on specific areas. Most reports follow the following structure, *but please look at your assignment question and marking guide carefully, as the format and terminology required in your report may vary from this guide. If so, check with your tutor.* Please check your marking guide to determine the word limit and how marks are allocated to each section.

A report must have:

1. Title Page
2. Table of Contents
3. Abstract or Executive Summary
4. Introduction (or Terms of Reference and Procedure)
5. Findings and/or Discussion
6. Conclusions
7. Recommendations
8. References

A report may also contain:

1. Cover letter
2. Bibliography
3. Glossary
4. Appendices

The table below summarises the main headings used in reports and outlines the purpose of each section. Please note: Further headings or subheadings may be used depending on the report's content, and are specific to the individual report.

Section	Purpose
Title Page (Not part of the word count)	Gives the title of the report, the student name/number, the name of the person the report is being submitted to, and the completion date.
Table of Contents (Not part of the word count)	Shows the sections of the report. Gives the headings, subheadings and page numbers.
Abstract or Executive Summary	Gives a summary of the whole report. Outlines the report's purpose, methodology, findings, main conclusions and recommendations. Mainly written in past tense, and prepared last.
Terms of Reference	Briefly states the purpose and scope of the report. This includes who requested the report, the main issues or problems to be identified, the reason for undertaking the report and the due date of the report.
Procedure	Outlines the methods used to collect information e.g. interviews, questionnaires, observations and/or

	research.
<p>Introduction (May be used instead of the Terms of Reference and Procedure)</p>	<p>Outlines the context, background and purpose of the report.</p> <p>Defines terms and sets limits of the investigation.</p> <p>The reader/audience can easily identify what the report is about, how information was gathered, and why the report is needed.</p> <p>Mainly uses past tense and can be written last – but is presented first.</p>
<p>Findings and/or Discussion For this section, avoid using the headings “Findings” or “Discussion”. Instead, create headings and sub-headings that identify the main issues or problems.</p>	<p>Findings: What was found during the research or investigation.</p> <p>Gives the facts only – no interpretation by the writer of the report.</p> <p>Tables, graphs or diagrams can be used.</p> <p>Must be relevant to the issues and problems identified in the Terms of Reference.</p> <p>Arranged in a logical order with headings and sub-headings.</p> <p>Discussion: You may also be required to analyse, interpret and evaluate the findings. The discussion draws together different parts of the findings and may refer to findings of other studies and/or theories.</p>
<p>Conclusions</p>	<p>Brief statements of the key findings of the report (full explanation is given in the Findings and/or Discussion).</p> <p>Arranged so the major conclusions come first.</p> <p>Should relate directly to the objectives set out in the Terms of Reference or Introduction.</p>

	Follow logically from the facts in the Findings and/or Discussion. Must be complete enough for recommendations to be made from them.
Recommendations (note: not all reports give recommendations)	The opinions of the writer of the report about possible changes, or solutions to the problems, including who should take action, what should be done, when and how it should be done.
References (Not part of the word count)	A list of the sources that are used in and referred to in the report. Use APA referencing style.
Bibliography (Not always required)	Lists any sources that were read for the research but were not cited in the report. (Bibliography is not included in the word count).
Appendices (Not always required)	Additional relevant information. May include interview questions, surveys, glossary etc. (Appendices are not included in the word count).

The major part of the report will consist of the Introduction, Findings and/or Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.

Source: Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology. Report writing. Retrieved from http://library.cpit.ac.nz/learning_services/learning_and_study_resources/assessment_tasks/report_writing, 29 May 2013.

Further reading (resources available from TPP library)

Blicq, R. & Moretto, L. (2004). *Technically-write!* 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education. Chapter 4: Short, informal reports; Chapter 5: Longer informal and semi-formal reports; Chapter 6: Formal reports.

Daniel, C. (2012). *Reader-friendly reports: a no-nonsense guide to effective writing for MBAs, consultants and other professionals*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

- De Luca, R. & Annals, A. (2006). *Writing that works: a guide for tertiary students*. 2nd ed. Auckland, N. Z.: Pearson Education New Zealand.
- Emerson, L. (2009). Reports. In her *Writing guidelines for business students*. 4th ed. South Melbourne, Vic.: Cengage Learning, p. 34-54.
- Eunson, B. (1994). *Writing and presenting reports*. Sydney: Wiley.
- Forsyth, P. (2010). *How to write reports, and proposals*. 2nd rev. ed. London: Kogan Page.
- Lerner, M. (2001). *Writing smart: your guide to great writing*. 2nd rev. ed. Auckland, N.Z.: Random House.
- Magdalinski, T. (2013). *Study skills for sports studies*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge. Chapter 7: Academic writing: how to write reports.
- Publication manual of the American Psychological Association*. (2010). 6th ed. Washing, DC: APA.