



STUDY GUIDE

WRITING REPORTS

WHAT IS A REPORT

This guide outlines some general principles of report writing. Reports can serve several purposes, but this guidance will cover most of the types of reports that you need to write – always check requirements with your module leader. The guidance does not cover research reports, they are specialised type of report for which more guidance will be provided. Students often ask, what is the difference, between a report and an essay, the main difference is that in reports you can use:

- Summary
- Subheadings
- Sections
- Diagrams
- Tables
- Statistics
- Recommendations

THE NATURE OF A REPORT

A written report is a document that presents specific information as accurately and as concisely as possible to a particular audience. Reports are often used to inform, guide, investigate issues, highlight implications, make recommendations and enable decision making , e.g:

- **An employer might want a marketing report in order to make decisions about offering a new service**
- **Results of an investigation into different treatments for a condition and recommendations about what would be best**
- **A Government report might be about informing the public about a change in policy and its implications**
- **The Quality Assurance Agency might write a report about the results of the National Student Survey and how those results might be used to improve the student experience in Higher Education**

You will only be able to determine the flow of your report when you have identified its audience, purpose and the conclusion that it should arrive at, e.g. making recommendation, asking for a decision, highlighting the impact of actions.

Normal referencing principles apply, though the writing style and presentation will differ from those of an essay.

LAYOUT AND STRUCTURE

Normally reports are structured using the following sections – do check your assessment brief or with your module leader to see what is required and adapt the structure to comply with their instructions.

- Summary – summary of the main points of the report on a front sheet
- Introduction – start of the report
- Evidence and Findings – presenting evidence to support and justifying your findings and provide a short summary of those findings. They will be discussed in greater detail in the body of the report
- Discussion – split into sections, themes and subtopics – main body of the report
- Conclusion – closes the report by summarising it and often including recommendations, request for a decision or other actions
- Appendices

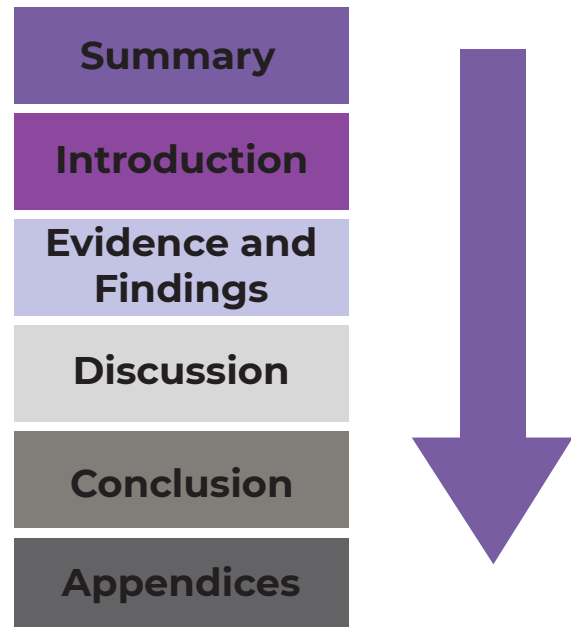


Figure 1: the order in which people tend to read reports (Turner et al., 2010)

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SUMMARY

Reports will often provide a summary on its front page, so that the reader can without reading the whole report quickly see the following:

- The purpose of the report
- The main findings/discussions of the report
- Its recommendations/conclusions
- Any follow-on actions

INTRODUCTION

Introduction: sets out the purpose of the report – what the rationale for writing the report is

Put in simple terms why did we write this report and why you should read it. Therefore this section will explain the purpose of the report, e.g. to inform, to guide, to examine and make recommendations, to investigate and make a decision. You will also make it quite clear to the reader what is the scope of the report, i.e. what it will deal with and importantly what it will not deal with. This section will be factual it should not include any discussion of the contents of the report.

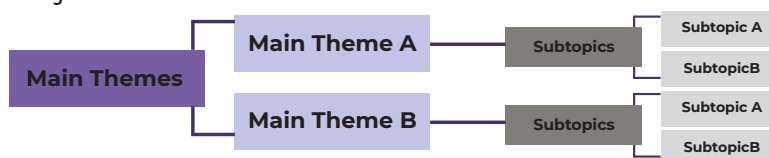
EVIDENCE AND FINDINGS

In this section there is only one objective – explaining the evidence for and presenting your findings as simply and clearly as possible. In this section you will probably make use of graphs, tables or diagrams so that it is easy to understand your findings.

THE BODY OF THE REPORT

The body of the report will explore the themes of the report in some depth. It is your opportunity to show off your thinking skills as you discuss any problems encountered, analyse the implications of the findings, evaluate pros and cons, and examine the key themes in more detail. To structure your discussion, you should make use of several sections.

Each section should deal with a different, but related, aspect of the report. Readers reading each section should be able to identify the main themes and their subtopics. These should be presented in a logical order – starting with the major themes, before moving onto subtopics. And within the major themes put them in order of importance – that is which them will have the most significant impact. Subtopics should follow the same order as major themes.



CONCLUSIONS AND APPRENDICES

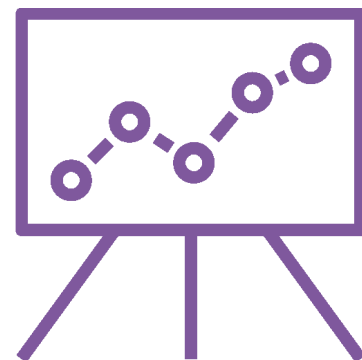
This section sums up the implications of the findings as discussed above, identifying the main issues brought to light by your research/investigations and how they relate to the purpose of the report. Also, recommendations, decisions and/or further action that need to be considered and their rationale.

WRITING AND PRESENTING A REPORT

It is generally advised that a report should be written very clearly, simply and factually, with a necessary amount of discussion, for your reader; so that they understand and can carry out any further action if required.

Language. The kind of language used in the report will depend upon the audience of your report. Always aim to use the most appropriate word for context; be specific with words and phrases; use language that is straightforward; keep sentences and paragraphs reasonably short; use humour only when appropriate (very rarely); be objective; and be sensitive to issues of inclusivity around, for example, gender, age, ability, race, sexuality and religion.

Presentation and layout. Building a clear structure will help your reader and also reflect well on your thinking, planning and focus. Avoid overly subjective language so as not to show inappropriate bias. A consistent style should reflect your consistent approach to the report and its themes, it will also, help to reassure your reader of the report's validity. Good spelling and grammar and the avoidance of exclusive jargon are important because they too will help raise your reader's confidence in your work.



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CHECKLIST FOR A GOOD REPORT

- 1** Clearly explain the purpose of the report – check that you refer frequently to its purpose, but particularly in the recommendation section and any justification of those recommendations.
- 2** Present your ideas in a structured and logically way – check that your ideas link back to the purpose of the report and that they lead to a justification of your recommendations.
- 3** You will have lots of ideas, but you must prioritise them – think about the purpose of the report and the decisions that you are asking the readers to make – putting each idea in a section will give the report a good flow – start with the main idea first (sections do not have to be of equal length).

The purpose of a report may be to:

- Inform
- Provide guidance
- Make recommendations
- Come to a decision
- Or possibly all or several of the above

Therefore, you must include information that:

- Is accurate
- Is relevant material – it should cover the key points
- Analyse your evidence/data
- Is presented in a language, tone and style that is clear, direct and formal

- 5** Check that your arguments lead to your recommendations and your conclusions, by doing a simple flow chart of key words/ideas – this will show inconsistencies.
- 6** If illustrations such as figures and tables have been included, make sure that they are clearly explained and properly referenced.
- 7** Have you:
 - Reviewed and edited your work – you may have to do several edits so leave enough time for this very important exercise
 - Checked grammar, punctuation and spelling
 - Clearly directed readers to appendices (in numerical order) in the body of the report and labelled them and check that you are within the word count
 - Referenced your sources, in the main body and at the end in a list of references

