

Report writing

What is a report and how does it differ from writing an essay? Reports are concise and have a formal structure. They are often used to communicate the results or findings of a project.

Essays by contrast are often used to show a tutor what you think about a topic. They are discursive and the structure can be left to the discretion of the writer.

Who and what is the report for?

Before you write a report, you need to be clear about who you are writing the report for and why the report has been commissioned.

Keep the audience in mind as you write your report, think about what they need to know. For example, the report could be for:

- the general public
- academic staff
- senior management
- a customer/client.

Reports are usually assessed on content, structure, layout, language, and referencing. You should consider the focus of your report, for example:

- Are you reporting on an experiment?
- Is the purpose to provide background information?
- Should you be making recommendations for action?

Language of report writing

Reports use clear and concise language, which can differ considerably from essay writing.

They are often broken down into sections, which each have their own headings and sub-headings. These sections may include bullet points or numbering as well as more structured sentences. Paragraphs are usually shorter in a report than in an essay.

Both essays and reports are examples of academic writing. You are expected to use grammatically correct sentence structure, vocabulary and punctuation.

Academic writing is formal so you should avoid using apostrophes and contractions such as “it’s” and “couldn’t”. Instead, use “it is” and “could not”.

Structure and organisation

Reports are much more structured than essays. They are divided into sections and sub-sections that are formatted using bullet points or numbering.

Report structures do vary among disciplines, but the most common structures include the following:

Title page

The title page needs to be informative and descriptive, concisely stating the topic of the report.

Abstract (or Executive Summary in business reports)

The abstract is a brief summary of the context, methods, findings and conclusions of the report. It is intended to give the reader an overview of

the report before they continue reading, so it is a good idea to write this section last.

An executive summary should outline the key problem and objectives, and then cover the main findings and key recommendations.

Table of contents

Readers will use this table of contents to identify which sections are most relevant to them. You must make sure your contents page correctly represents the structure of your report.

[Take a look at this sample contents page.](#)

Introduction

In your introduction you should include information about the background to your research, and what its aims and objectives are. You can also refer to the literature in this section; reporting what is already known about your question/topic, and if there are any gaps. Some reports are also expected to include a section called 'Terms of references', where you identify who asked for the report, what it covers, and what its limitations are.

Methodology

If your report involved research activity, you should state what that was, for example you may have interviewed clients, organised some focus groups, or done a literature review. The methodology section should provide an accurate description of the material and procedures used so that others could replicate the experiment you conducted.

Results/findings

The results/findings section should be an objective summary of your findings, which can use tables, graphs, or figures to describe the most

important results and trends. You do not need to attempt to provide reasons for your results (this will happen in the discussion section).

Discussion

In the discussion you are expected to critically evaluate your findings. You may need to re-state what your report was aiming to prove and whether this has been achieved. You should also assess the accuracy and significance of your findings, and show how it fits in the context of previous research.

Conclusion/recommendations

Your conclusion should summarise the outcomes of your report and make suggestions for further research or action to be taken. You may also need to include a list of specific recommendations as a result of your study.

References

The references are a list of any sources you have used in your report. Your report should use the standard referencing style preferred by your school or department eg Harvard, Numeric, OSCOLA etc.

Appendices

You should use appendices to expand on points referred to in the main body of the report. If you only have one item it is an appendix, if you have more than one they are called appendices. You can use appendices to provide backup information, usually data or statistics, but it is important that the information contained is directly relevant to the content of the report.

Appendices can be given alphabetical or numerical headings, for example Appendix A, or Appendix 1. The order they appear at the back of your report is determined by the order that they are mentioned in the body of your report. You should refer to your appendices within the text of your

report, for example 'see Appendix B for a breakdown of the questionnaire results'. Don't forget to list the appendices in your contents page.

Presentation and layout

Reports are written in several sections and may also include visual data such as figures and tables. The layout and presentation is therefore very important.

Your tutor or your module handbook will state how the report should be presented in terms of font sizes, margins, text alignment etc.

You will need good IT skills to manipulate graphical data and work with columns and tables. If you need to improve these skills, try the following online resources:

- [Microsoft online training through LinkedIn Learning](#)
- [Engage web resource on using tables and figures in reports](#)

Source: University of Leeds – Online resources: [Report writing | Library | University of Leeds](#)