Prifysgol Cymru
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University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

200
1822 - 2022

Academic Writing – Essays and Reports

Man Geni Addysg Uwch yng Nghymru
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Study Skills Resources

- To help improve your academic writing skills, it is advised that you take time to read The Study Skills Handbook by Stella Cottrell via our online reading list tab on Moodle.
- If you require further assistance, please speak to your lecturer.

Academic Writing

- The following slides are designed to help you develop an understanding of the requirements associated with ***Essay and Report Writing.***

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this session, you will be able to:

- Recognise the differences between essays and reports
- Understand the structure of an academic report
- Understand the structure of an academic essay

Academic Reports

- The most appropriate software to use for an academic report would be Microsoft Word.
- An academic report is usually written in the third person in order to be objective rather than subjective. Relying less on personal thoughts and more on facts lends credibility to your work and alleviates instances of bias, giving it a stronger focus.

Academic Reports

- When preparing to write a report, it is essential to identify the main requirements. You must be clear about what areas your lecturer wants you to cover. These will then determine the organisation of the report.

Report writing

Reports are informative and fact based

A report is a formal document therefore you need to ensure your writing style is appropriate

- Academic reports are usually written using the 'third person'. This means avoiding the use of personal language such as: I, me, we (1st person) and you and yours (2nd person)
- Include headings and subheadings, tables and graphs
- The use of bullet points is acceptable for reports

*Always refer to the assessment brief for guidance. If there is anything you do not understand please ask your lecturer.

Academic Reports

- An academic report will always contain **references** and be written in **clear** and **precise** language. It should be **free from spelling and grammatical errors**.

First things first - Cover page

- Your Name
- Student Number
- Title of Report
- Module Tutor
- Submission Date
- Word Count

Report Format: Executive Summary

An executive summary is a brief summary of the report. Your executive summary should state:

- Why the report has been written (i.e. the question or problem it is addressing).
- How the study was undertaken and what the main findings were.
- The significance of the findings. Be specific and precise to give the reader a succinct understanding of the main points without reading the entire report.
- The executive summary should be on its own page and is usually written as a single paragraph with no indentation.

Table of Contents

- This should be on a separate page to the executive summary. It helps the reader to locate specific information, and shows which topics are covered in what order. Any figures and tables included in the report should also appear here.

*Please note, the next slide is an example only. You should always read the task description within your assignment brief. If there is anything you do not understand, ask your lecturer to advise.

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Introduction

- Your introduction should be on another page. There are usually three aspects of an introduction:
- **The background:** This describes the work that has previously been done into your topic, why you are undertaking the study and what led to this.
- **The purpose:** This outlines the aims of the study and the specific terms of reference that will be used, as well as the authority given to the study.
- **The scope:** This establishes any limitations that might be faced during the study, such as time constraints, costs etc.

Main Body

This differs according to the type of report, but covers the following questions:

- Who?
- Why?
- Where?
- When?
- What?
- How?

The main body of a formal report would include all the information necessary to back up the validity and reliability of your findings and conclusion, presented systematically.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Your conclusion should be brief but long enough to get your point across, drawing together key discussion points that have already been raised. You should not introduce any new discussion points or ideas, and should rely only on facts taken from the main body of your report and the conclusions that can be drawn from these, rather than any speculative actions. The most important conclusion should be presented first.

Recommendations: These should flow straight from the conclusions, and once again, the most important recommendations should be established first. If there are multiple recommendations, these may take the form of bullet points.

References

- Any sources or works that have been referred to in your report should be gathered into a list and referenced accurately, so that the reader is able to easily find these for themselves.

Top Tip!

- Once you have finished writing your report, proofread your work to make sure that it reads well, features all of the necessary aspects, and is free of grammar, spelling and punctuation mistakes.

Appendices

Appendices should include ***relevant supporting material*** that may be too cumbersome to include in the main body of the report. For example, tables, graphs, charts, questionnaires, interview questions.

Appendices should be kept to a minimum and only contain reference materials illustrating and supporting arguments fully made in the main body of the work.

Purpose and audience

- If you consider the purpose and the audience the report is intended for, you can be confident that the report will fulfil its needs
- There are different ways of writing a report depending on the topic, purpose and audience. There are also discipline–specific conventions.
- The main thing to remember is you must follow the brief you have been set.

Academic Essays

- The most appropriate software to use for an academic essay would be Microsoft Word.
- Like academic reports, academic essays are usually written in the third person. You must present your ideas as a coherent argument and structure this in a way that makes sense to the reader, covering one idea at a time.

Academic Essays

An essay is a **continuous** piece of writing, set out in paragraphs, responding to a question or a title. When preparing to write an essay, it is essential to identify the main requirements of the title. You must be clear about what areas your lecturer wants you to cover. These will then determine the organisation of the essay.

- Unless reflective, academic essays are usually written using the 'third person'. This means avoiding the use of personal language such as: I, me, we (1st person) and you and yours (2nd person)
- Always refer to the assessment brief for guidance. If there is anything you do not understand please ask your lecturer.

What’s the structure?

The structure of an essay starts with an introduction. The main body of your essay follows through with a series of arguments and debates, backed up by evidence. This will enable the writer to form conclusions.

An essay does not normally use headings within the work, although it will have a main heading, usually setting out the title or question given.

What is the Structure Continued…

- Essays are ***not*** the same as reports. There must be ***no*** inclusion of a contents page, side headings, graphs, charts, tables, diagrams, illustrations, photographs, bullet points or such like within the essay.
- Hidden within this straightforward structure you must ensure that the essay has a logical flow, separated by paragraphs leading the reader towards the conclusions via a series of arguments, backed up by evidence.
- Essay's are argumentative and ideas based
- An essay will always contain references and be written in clear and precise language. It should be free from spelling and grammatical errors.

First things first - Cover Page

For academic work you should always include a cover page:

- Your Name
- Student Number
- Title of Essay
- Module Tutor
- Submission Date
- Word Count

Academic Essay Format

- The first thing an academic essay should do is introduce the topic and surrounding context, to establish a framework through which you will be approaching your argument. It **sets the scene** for what is to follow!

- The body of your essay should back up what you established in the introduction. Begin each paragraph with a sentence establishing the topic and your argument, ideally following a similar pattern across all paragraphs for cohesion. The points you raise in each paragraph should be backed up by evidence.

- **Consider depth and breadth. An essay isn't everything you have ever found out about a topic!**

Academic Essay Format

- Your conclusion should bring together all of the arguments you have presented throughout your essay, as well as linking back to what you set out in the introduction. The conclusion should only be a summary of key themes and ideas that have already been raised, with no new information or arguments introduced at this point.

Academic Essay Format

- An academic essay should always include an accurate list of any sources and references incorporated throughout.

Top Tip!

- Proofread your essay once completed to ensure that it flows properly, contains all of the ***necessary aspects*** and is free of grammar, spelling and punctuation mistakes.

One Final tip!

- Reference, Reference, Reference!
- Remember that regardless of which method of assessment you are required to use, you must acknowledge any instances where you use someone else's words, ideas, images or research in your own work.

Guidance on word lengths of sections in a typical essay

Total length of essay	1,000 words	2,000 words	5,000 words	10,000 words
Introduction 10-15%	100 – 150 words	200 – 300 words	500 – 750 words	1,000 – 1500 words
Body 80% paragraphs	3 paragraphs of 200 words	4 paragraphs of 400 words	8 paragraphs of 500 words	16 paragraphs of 500 words
	or	or	or	or
	4 paragraphs of 150 words	5 paragraphs of 300 words	9 paragraphs of 450 words	17 paragraphs of 450 words
Conclusion 5-10%	50-100 words	100–200 words	250–500 words	500–1,000 words

Reports	Essays
• Formally structured • Informative and fact-based • Written with a specific purpose and reader in mind • Written in a style appropriate to each section • Always include section headings • Can include bullet points • Can include tables or graphs • Offer conclusions • Offer recommendations for action • Include in-text citations and a reference list	• Semi-structured • Argumentative and idea-based • Not written with a specific reader in mind • Written in single narrative style throughout • Usually **do not** include sub-headings • Usually **do not** include bullet points • Usually **do not** include tables or graphs • Offer conclusions • Include in-text citations and a reference list

Any questions? ☺