

## 1.22

### REPORT WRITING

**At the completion of this fact sheet you will:**

- **Know what aspects to consider when planning to write a report**
- **Understand the structure of a report**
- **Know what should be contained in the various sections of a report**

Just think how important written reports are to the way we humans communicate. At university, a large part of our time is spent investigating a certain topic and writing essays or reports. We are also required to submit laboratory, field-trip or work-placement reports. Further, no matter what type of organisation, hardly any major decisions are made without detailed reports. Following is an overview of the structure and content that is required when producing and submitting a report.

#### STRUCTURE OF A REPORT

A generic report should have seven main sections – the most important of which will be the summary, findings and recommendations. The largest section will be the body presenting the facts and relevant considerations.

The following is a general structure/layout that should be followed when producing a report.

1. Title page including full title, name of authors and date
2. Summary including report findings and recommendations
3. Contents page
4. Body
5. Findings/Conclusions
6. Recommendations
7. Appendices

An excellent overview of how to correctly structure and format a report can be found at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>. This site not only covers general report writing questions, but also provides a basic report template.

#### Title Page

The title should be precise and convey the main objective of the study or the project. This page could also include subtitles, which give more information about the project.

#### Summary

This is the most important part of the report. The summary should contain the gist of the report. The entire information carried in the report must be conveyed in its essence. This is going to be the section which will influence a reader to read the whole report or not.

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The summary must convey the results. One must tell the readers what they want to know (i.e. the results) immediately. Ideally, the first paragraph must itself satisfy their curiosity.

The summary must be precise and contain as much non-technical language as possible.

### Table of Contents

This section gives the broad contents of the report and the flow of information in the report. The arrangement of topics and the flow of information should be as logical as possible and ideas should naturally follow each other.

### Introduction

The introduction to a report is where you "set the scene" and help the reader to understand what the report is for and how you are going to lead him or her through the discussion. Regard the introduction as a tool to help understanding. Here are four simple principles for writing effective introductions.

- Explain why the report is needed
- Define new terms
- Explain how you will lead the reader (Methodology)
- Mention how you will deal with any difficult issues
- Be direct but do not begin your arguments

### Body

The body of a report contains a description of how you conducted the investigation (sometimes called the "method"), what was found (sometimes called the "results") and a discussion of the results in relation to the problem. Here are five suggestions to ensure that the body of your report is easy to read.

- Have only one idea per paragraph
- Leave a line between paragraphs
- Keep sentences to not more than two lines
- Keep paragraphs to less than twenty lines
- Use sub-headings

### Conclusion

Apart from the summary, the conclusion is the most important part of the report. It is in this section that you focus the reader's attention on your main findings and your recommendations. To write effective conclusions follow these principles.

- Summarise the main findings and what they mean for the problem
- Offer recommendations
- Don't offer new arguments

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## Summary

- A report should be planned and the format should be consistent throughout
- There are seven main elements to a report's structure: Title page, summary, contents page, body, conclusions, recommendations and appendices.

## References

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