



REPORT WRITING

As Established in the School P&P Supporting the School IA&IP 2020-2023

ST9T Training (#2)

Report Writing Format

Unlike an essay, which sets out to defend a writer's view about a topic and does not have to feature headings, a report discusses a topic in a structured, easy-to-follow format. Reports are divided into sections with headings and subheadings.

Reports can be academic, technical, or business-oriented, and feature recommendations for specific actions. Reports are written to present facts about a situation, project, or process and will define and analyze the issue at hand. Ultimately, the goal of a report is to relay observations to a specific audience in a clear and concise style. Let's review the proper report writing format so you can craft a professional finished product.

Preparation and Planning

First, you should take some time to prepare and plan for your report. Before you start writing, identify the audience. Your report should be written and tailored to the readers' needs and expectations. When planning, ask yourself several questions to better understand the goal of the report. Some questions to consider include:

- ❖ What is it about?
- ❖ What exactly is needed?
- ❖ Why is it needed?
- ❖ When do I need to do it?
- ❖ Who is it for, or who is it aimed at?

Once you identify the basics of your report, you can begin to collect supporting information, then sort and evaluate that information. The next step is to organize your information and begin putting it together in an outline. With proper planning, it will be easier to write your report and stay organized.

Formatting the Report Elements

To keep your report organized and easy to understand, there is a certain format to follow. This report writing format will make it easier for the reader to find what he is looking for. Remember to write all the sections in plain English, except the body, which can be as technical as you need it to be.

The main sections of a standard report are as follows:

Title

If the report is short, the front cover can include any information that you feel is necessary, such as the author(s) and the date prepared. In a longer report, you may want to include a table of contents and a definition of terms.

Summary

The summary consists of the major points, conclusions, and recommendations. It needs to be short, as it is a general overview of the report. Some people will read the summary and only skim the report, so make sure you include all of the relevant information. It would be best to write this when the report is finished so you will include everything, even points that might be added at the last minute.

Introduction

The first page of the report needs to have an introduction. Here you will explain the problem and inform the reader why the report is being made. You need to give a definition of terms if you did not include these in the title section, and explain how the details of the report are arranged.

Formatting the Report Elements

Body

This is the main section of the report. The previous sections needed to be written in plain English, but this section can include technical terms or jargon from your industry. There should be several sections, each clearly labeled, making it easy for readers to find the information they seek. Information in a report is usually arranged in order of importance with the most important information coming first. Alternatively, you might choose to order your points by complexity or time.

Discussion

If you wish, this optional section can be included at the end of the main body to go over your findings and their significance.

Analyze your findings and draw conclusions

This is where everything comes together. Keep this section free of jargon as many people will just read the summary and conclusion.

- ❖ What have I found?
- ❖ What's significant or important about my findings?
- ❖ What do my findings suggest?

This is where you discuss any actions that need to be taken. In plain English, explain your recommendations, putting them in order of priority. To help you decide what to recommend:

Make Recommendations

- ❖ Reread your findings and conclusions.
- ❖ Think about what you want the person who asked for the report should to do or not do; what actions should they carry out?
- ❖ Check that your recommendations are practical and are based logically on your conclusions.
- ❖ Ensure you include enough detail for the reader to know what needs to be done and who should do it.

Recommendations should be written as a numbered list, and ordered from most to least important.

Report Presentation

You will want to present your report in a simple and concise style that is easy to read and navigate. Readers want to be able to look through a report and get to the information they need as quickly as possible. That way the report has a greater impact on the reader.

There are simple formatting styles that can be used throughout your report that will make it easy to read and look organized and presentable. For example:

- ❖ **Font:** Use just one font in your report. An easy-to-read font such as Arial or Times New Roman is best for reports. Section headings can be a different font from the main text if you prefer.
- ❖ **Lists:** Use lists whenever appropriate to break information into easy-to-understand points. Lists can either be numbered or bulleted.
- ❖ **Headings and Subheadings:** You can use headings and subheadings throughout your report to identify the various topics and break the text into manageable chunks. These will help keep the report organized and can be listed in the table of contents so they can be found quickly.

First Impressions Count

Reports should be well-organized and easy to follow. To achieve this, following a structured format will keep your writing on track. How a report is presented makes not only a lasting impression but also makes the writer seem more credible and reliable.

A finishing touch to make a great impression on the reader is how you package the report. Always print the final report on good quality paper. You may also want to consider placing the report in a binder or folder. Remember, first impressions always count! And, when it's time to change gears from the formality of a report to a persuasive essay, check out *Persuasive Essay Writing Made Easy*.

Report Writing Style

- ❖ **Keep It Simple.** Don't try to impress; rather try to communicate. Keep sentences short and to the point. Do not go into a lot of details unless it is needed. Make sure every word needs to be there, that it contributes to the purpose of the report.
- ❖ **Use the Active Voice.** Active voice makes the writing move smoothly and easily. It also uses fewer words than the passive voice and gives impact to the writing by emphasizing the person or thing responsible for an action. For example: "Bad customer service decreases repeat business" is more concise and direct than "Repeat business is decreased by bad customer service."
- ❖ **Mind Your Grammar.** Read the report aloud and have someone proofread it for you. Remember that the computer cannot catch all the mistakes, especially with words like "red/read" or "there/their." You may even want to wait a day after you write it to come back and look at it with fresh eyes.
- ❖ **Academic Writing.** The first thing to note is that academic writing is extremely formal. Typically, it should be free of contractions and any sort of slang. It's also important, generally, to write in the third person, eliminating pronouns like "I" and "we."
- ❖ **Business Writing.** Business writing will also take on a formal tone. However, it's allowed to be slightly less buttoned up. The goal in a business report is to present new initiatives and "get things done." Here, things like contractions would be permissible, along with ample imagery and data.
- ❖ **Technical Writing.** Technical reports focus on how to do something. While an academic or even a business report will attempt to prove something, a technical report is more descriptive in nature. Also, the report writing format for students and professionals may cite facts and statistics to make their case, but technical reports are more likely to follow a logical, step-by-step approach.

Selecting Your Topic

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Revise Your Draft Report

It is always important to revise your work. Things you need to check include:

1. If you have done what you were asked to do. Check the assignment question, the instructions/guidelines and the marking schedule to make sure.
2. That the required sections are included, and are in the correct order.
3. That your information is accurate, with no gaps.
4. If your argument is logical. Does the information you present support your conclusions and recommendations?
5. That all terms, symbols and abbreviations used have been explained.
6. That any diagrams, tables, graphs and illustrations are numbered and labeled.
7. That the formatting is correct, including your numbering, headings, are consistent throughout the report.
8. That the report reads well, and your writing is as clear and effective as possible.

You might need to prepare several drafts before you are satisfied an issue a final report.
If possible, get someone else to check your report.