



student services

How do I write a report?

Report writing differs from essay writing because it has a different purpose. Reports are common communication tools as they assist in the decision making process. Written for a particular purpose, they usually outline a problem, provide the relevant facts and ideas relate to the situation, and then recommend a course of action.

Reports are highly structured so that information they contain can be easily understood. Headings within the report allow the reader to select the parts they wish to read. Headings also enable each section of the report to stand-alone. The structure of a report is enhanced through the use of subheadings, diagrams, tables, graphs, illustrations etc.

As a student, you will be asked to write reports to show that you have investigated or researched a particular problem. Although each subject coordinator may have slightly different requirements and/or ways to structure reports, the following is an example of a basic report format. Remember to always check each Subject Outline for individual subject requirements.

A 10-step plan of how to write a report (Sanders 2000, p. 200).

1. Consider the aim of the report and who will read it.
2. Plan your investigational approach.
3. Gather information.
4. Organise the information you have gathered.
5. Analyse the material.
6. Decide your conclusions.
7. Decide your recommendations.
8. Plan your writing.
9. Write your draft.
10. Edit and prepare the final copy.

As presentation of your report is very important, you should:

- follow the guidelines recommended in your Subject Outline;
- check the accuracy of the support data and facts;
- check that your argument is logical and that the conclusion and recommendations flow logically from the data you have presented;
- explain terms which the reader may not know, or where clarity requires it;
- explain symbols, abbreviations, diagrams and statistics if necessary;
- label and number all diagrams; tables; graphs; illustrations etc.
- be consistent in the use of a numbering system; headings; font size and type;
- use a clear and concise style of writing;
- layout the report in a clear and uncluttered format;
- be meticulous with your use of references;
- check that your argument is logical and that the conclusion and recommendations flow logically from the data you have presented.

Basic report format:

Title Page

Table of Contents

Synopsis/Executive Summary

This tells your reader what the report is about as it describes the topics or issues discussed; indicates the depth of the discussion; as well as providing a summary of the recommendations and reasons for them. It is usually one paragraph of approximately 120 words. Usually this is not included in your word count. If in doubt, check with your Subject Coordinator.

1. Introduction

This tells your reader what you're going to tell them in the body of your report. Your introduction gives the background to the report; why it is useful; what other objectives are; the purpose of the report; the limitations of the report...

2. Heading

This is where you begin the discussion, outlining relevant facts and events. This is the main body of the report, and is divided into sections (headings) and subheadings.

- 2.1 Subheading
- 2.2 Subheading
- 2.3 Subheading

3. Heading

- 3.1 Subheading
- 3.2 Subheading
- 3.3 Subheading

4. Conclusion

This is where you give an overview of the material presented in the discussion and an interpretation of the relevant facts and events.

5. Recommendations

These are drawn from your conclusions. Your recommendations outline the specific actions that are required. When detailing your recommendations you may also need to consider who will action them; how they will be measured; and the timeframe for the recommendations. The priority that you place on each recommendation may also be required.

References

A listing of all resources referred to in the report; assembled in author alphabetical order. These are not included in the word count. Refer to Topic 9 of this guide for more detail.

Appendices

The appendices include related materials, if appropriate. These are not included in the word count. These are optional for the reader, that is, the reader can choose whether they refer to them or not.

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