

Writing a Business Report

Writing Centre Learning Guide

Overview

1. **Start your report with the main point.** Why is this report important? Why was it requested? What has it found?
2. **Organise your content.** Divide your information to blocks of topics.
3. **Give each block a title/heading.**
4. **Begin each block with the main point.** If your heading is a question, your first sentence should be the answer.
5. **Use detail, examples, data.** Back up each main point with specific information and/or numbers from your research.
6. **Give a recommendation.** Call for action and point the way ahead. What should your client do next?

Structure

1. **Title Page:** Title of your report, your name, student number and your course.
2. **Table of Contents:** include headings, subheadings and page numbers
3. **Executive summary:** Summarises your whole report, and gives your reader a clear idea of what your report says, without needing to read it. Start with the report's purpose, then give your scope, main points, and a summary of your findings and recommendations.
4. **Introduction:** summarises the issue or problem, its background and context, why it matters, why you're looking into it and the scope of the task. You can also introduce your approach and explain your methodology in finding and sorting data.
5. **Literature Review:** Some reports require extra readings on the topic. This is where you research peer-reviewed articles about the problem to let your client know what the literature says.
6. **Method:** Explain how you did the research. Did you interview teenagers on consumer behavior? Did you give a survey out to 50 teenagers, and based your report on these results? Did you investigate the market trends affecting teenagers in the past 20 years? In this section you should show numbers, graphs, charts and tables with your data.

This section may include:

- the type of research design, e.g. qualitative or quantitative?
- sampling procedure, e.g. did you use probability sampling or non-probability sampling techniques and why?
- data collection procedure, e.g. how was the data/information collected? Did you do face-to-face interviews? What are the sources of your information and why did you choose them?

→ data analysis procedure, e.g. how was the data/information analysed and why?

7. **Findings:** this will make up the bulk of your report. This section lists your key findings when you applied your methodology and conducted your research.
8. **Discussions:** Explain the facts you discovered in your 'Findings' section and tell us what they mean. What implications do they have? What conclusions do you have about them? Once you answer these questions, it will be easy for you to plan the solutions.
9. **Recommendations:** explains the strategies you suggest to deal with the conclusion from your findings, or to solve the original problem. Indicate the benefits of each solution, e.g. return on investment or increase in sales. Recommendations are **not** your personal opinion. Your findings, your research and your data are the reasons (or evidence) behind your recommendations.
10. **Conclusion:** Wrap it all up and tell us what will happen next. Where should your client go from here? What's the next step for them?
11. **References:** a list of sources you cited in your report, such as a book with data you used, or an article from an expert you quoted. As long as you read a piece of information somewhere and used it in your report, you should include it in the References section.
12. **Appendices:** Detailed charts, survey examples, transcripts, or related reports.

Headings and Subheadings

A heading should tell your reader what they're about to learn, and advertise your section. It keeps your structure clear and helps your reader find information quickly, without having to read the whole report. Your headings and subheadings will appear in your Table of Contents. Keep them short and simple, like a newspaper heading. Resist using one-word headings like 'Methodology'; instead, tell us (very briefly) what the methodology is. For example, 'Measuring Customer Satisfaction by Surveys.'

● Heading Tips

- a. Noun phrases in your headings, e.g. 'Competitive Features of BMW'
- b. Questions, e.g. 'What Makes BMW Special?'
- c. Answers, e.g. 'BMW's Luxury is a Competitive Feature'
- d. Lists, e.g. 'Three Competitive Features of BMW'
- e. Whichever of the above you use, make sure you're using it for every section. Stay consistent to keep your reader's attention.
- f. Use a subheading for each block of information, or each BMW feature, e.g.
 - ❖ **Three Competitive Features of BMW**
 1. Timeless Luxury
 2. Quality Manufacturing
 3. Targeted Marketing

- **Language**

You're the expert in this case, so use authoritative and active language. Passive language is when you don't tell us who's doing the action, e.g. 'the report was written.' Active language is when you state who's doing the action, e.g. 'I wrote the report.' Here are some more detailed examples:

- **Passive language:**

It is a recommendation of the report that implementation of strategic responses conducive to a learning environment be prioritised and prosecuted with expedition across the institution.

- **Active language:**

Our research shows that when doctors adopt good-quality decision support in prescribing drugs, health outcomes improve significantly for patients.

Keep your sentences active, short and clear. Ideally, your sentences are 20 words or less. Use simple language as if you're having a conversation. Professional writing doesn't need to be difficult to understand, too formal or too academic. The simpler and clearer your expression is, the easier to read your work. Keep in mind that the best writing reads easily and naturally like it's being spoken to you by a friend. Aim to write in the same style, and keep your language friendly, professional, respectful and concise.

Language Tips

- Each sentence should only give us one new piece of information. If one sentence has two pieces of information, break it into two sentences.
- Each paragraph should only discuss one main point. If you find yourself starting to go into something else, start a new paragraph.
- Never use a long word where you can use a short word.
- If you are using a word that isn't adding any new meaning in a sentence you wrote, then you don't need to use that word at all and you can delete it. (Or: If a word isn't adding new meaning, delete it.)

References

Taking information, ideas, sentences or images from another source without referencing the author is considered **plagiarism**. Plagiarism could affect your course grade heavily, and you may be required to write the assignment again.

It's necessary to acknowledge the original source to avoid plagiarism. Include a reference list at the end of your report listing all the sources you have referred to in your assignment. You will need to know the book/article's title, its author, publisher, etc. of each source you use.

Each field has its own referencing style. The Faculty of the Professions often uses the Harvard Referencing Style. Your assignment instructions, or the course handbook, will mention which referencing style you need to use.

You can view the University's referencing style guides here:

<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/resources/referencing/>

Keep in mind that each report is different depending on the task. The above is the standard structure of a report, but you can personalise it to match your assignment.

This Guide's References

Avoiding plagiarism: Writing centre learning guide 2014, University of Adelaide, viewed 27 April 2017, <<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/resources/plagiarism/>>

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Thompson, A 2005, *Guide to business report writing*, Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation, Perth.

Tredennick, M & White, G 2010, *Little black business writing book*, UNSW Press, Sydney.