

# Report writing

Reports are used by business, government and other institutions for a number of purposes. Reports may:

- describe part of an organisation and the way it functions
- analyse a situation relevant to the organisation
- provide background on a particular subject relevant to the organisation
- evaluate a project.

At university some faculties require you to present your assignments in report form. Reports are written in formal (sometimes technical) language. Like an essay, they are presented in third person. Factual evidence and factually-based analysis are highly valued in the report writing.

The format that a report takes varies according to the purpose for which the report is intended. Although they vary, reports share a common structure which is very different from the structure of an essay. This material will provide you with the opportunity to examine the main features of a basic report and practise writing various components.

## Structure of a report

Following is an outline of the sections found most frequently in reports.

### Letter of transmittal

The letter of transmittal is a formal record of the delivery of the report. It transmits the report from the report-writer to the person who commissioned the report.

### Title page

The title page should include the following information: the title of the report, the name of the person (or organisation) who commissioned the report, the date of the submission, and the name of the author of the report.

### Executive summary

The executive summary provides an overview of the report's purpose, the methods used to compile the report, its findings and its recommendations. It should be a concise, self-contained document that covers all the important points in the report it summarises.

### Table of contents

The Table of contents lists the sections of the report in the order in which they appear. Each section is numbered consecutively and corresponding page numbers are indicated. A list of figures and tables provided in the report is added at the end of the Table of contents.

## Introduction

The introduction describes the background, purpose and scope of the report. It also indicates who commissioned or authorised the report and why the report was produced.

## Report body

The body of the report contains data, discussion and analysis. It is presented in a logical sequence. Headings and sub-headings are used to identify each section and sub-section. As in an essay, paragraphing is used to separate and develop ideas. Unlike an essay, the body of a report often contains tables and figures. Dot points can also be used where appropriate. The body of a report is a discussion or description of the material under investigation. The judgements about the material are left to the conclusions.

## Conclusions

The conclusion summarises the major points or findings of the assignment. This is the section that analyses and evaluates. It contains no new information. It should indicate if the purpose of the report was fulfilled, what type of data was used, and what conclusions were reached.

## Recommendations

Recommendations are often included in a report. They suggest a specific course of action based on the findings of the report. They should be based on the conclusions drawn from the report.

## List of references

The list of references is an alphabetical listing of all the material used in the preparation of the report.

## Appendices (if appropriate)

Appendices generally contain material that is relevant to the report but not suitable for the body of the report. All appendices have a title and are appropriately numbered. Materials suitable for inclusion in an appendix include maps, large amounts of data or copies of important documents. Material included in appendices must be correctly referenced.

## Writing your own report

You are required to write a report in this course. To assist you in this task, there follows a sample report and a set of exercises. Once you have completed these activities you will be ready to write your own report in the appropriate style.

The title of your report is.....**Lecturer to insert.**



### Activity 1

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Locate the sample report which follows (**lecturer to provide link**). Read through it and identify each of the parts of the report using the Table of contents as a guide.



## Activity 2

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Turn to the letter of transmittal. A letter of transmittal needs to provide a positive opening, further explanation and a goodwill message. This letter of transmittal has four paragraphs. The first contains a positive opening which transmits the report. The second paragraph gives a brief outline of the contents of the report. The third foreshadows the report's conclusions and recommendations, whilst the fourth contains a goodwill message.

Reread the letter, making sure you can identify each of these functions. Now write down the following information.

- Who compiled the report?
- Who commissioned the report?
- What is the report about?
- While the letter of transmittal is presented at the start of the report it is one of the last parts that can be written. Why?



## Activity 3

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Read the executive summary. The executive summary provides a summary of the important information presented in the report. It should be a self-contained document, but should also encourage the reader to read the entire report. The executive summary is very important. It should rarely be more than one page. No headings or quotes are used in an executive summary.

Now reread the executive summary. Each of the paragraphs describes a particular feature of the report. These are purpose, methodology, major findings and recommendations.

- What was the report's major finding?
- What recommendations were made?



## Activity 4

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Locate Section 2.1 using the Table of contents. Reread the section. Can you explain the difference between.....**(lecturer to insert)**.



## Activity 5

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Locate Figure 2.1 using the Table of contents. Answer the following questions.

- Comment on the choice of title for each of the headings.
- Are the sections of similar size? Is this a good idea?



## Activity 6

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Locate Section 3.1 using the Table of contents. Reread the section to make sure you understand the concept of.....**(lecturer to insert)**. Now locate Appendix A using the Table of contents. Appendix A provides a .....**(lecturer to insert)**.

Reread the section on.....**(lecturer to insert)**. When you read information it is important to question the author's assumptions. Identify two assumptions made in this section. Suggest some criticisms that could be levelled at these assumptions.

Now you are ready to write your own report. Return to the information you have just read and produced to ensure you are on track with each section.