

REPORT WRITING

By Dr Laurel Evelyn Dyson, University of Technology, Sydney

This brief guide is provided as an aid to help you write a report. It is not prescriptive, since the format of reports will vary. A report usually consists of the following components:

Title Page

Include:

- Title of report
- Organization or person for whom the report is intended
- Authors with their identifying information.

Executive Summary

Usually 1 or 2 paragraphs briefly summarizing:

- What the report was investigating
- Your main conclusions.

Sometimes it also includes your investigation/research methods and the report recommendations (if any).

The executive summary should be on a separate page. It is written when you have finished writing the report. Everything in the executive summary must already be in the body of the report.

Table of Contents

This should be on a separate page and include headings of the sections of your report and page numbers.

Introduction

An introduction is obligatory. It:

- Introduces the topic clearly and concisely
- Explains the aims of the report
- Sets the report context and may give some background behind the topic
- Orientates the reader and indicates what approach or attitude you are going to take.
- Gives an overview of the structure of the report, e.g., *Firstly, this report examines.. The second section deals with.. Lastly..*

The purpose of the introduction is to introduce the topic and make the report easier to read and understand. Typically, it may be from one paragraph long to a page or two. In writing the introduction, you must *not* assume that the reader has read the executive summary.

Research Methods (optional)

If you used special methods to investigate the topic you may want to provide details of these here, e.g., how you conducted a survey, a description of special equipment, statistical tests used.

Discussion

The bulk of your report will consist of the presentation of the findings of your research and a discussion of them. Sometimes, depending on the nature of the topic, the findings will be presented first in a separate section to the discussion. The ideas should be presented in a logical and clear manner: one idea should flow on naturally from the previous one. Each paragraph should have a separate idea and the first sentence of the paragraph should introduce that idea. It will make it easier to read if you divide your discussion into separate sections with headings.

Think of the discussion as centring around 6 major processes:

- describe
- report
- criticize
- compare
- analyze
- interpret.

A major cause of poor academic writing (and therefore poor marks) is spending too much time on the first two processes. Make sure you adopt a critical/analytical/interpretive approach, be concise and stick to your topic.

Throughout the body of your report, quote the source of your information in brackets. A recommended style of citing authors is the Harvard System:

<http://www.bell.uts.edu.au/referencing/harvard2.html>.

Note that footnotes are not recommended in many disciplines today.

Conclusion

A conclusion is obligatory. It pulls together the different strands of your research as well as stating what conclusions you have drawn as a result of your research.

Recommendations (optional)

Simple reports may not have recommendations but many business reports will. These should be listed in point format and are usually recommendations for action on the part of the company or organization that has commissioned the report.

References

A list of all books, journal articles, web pages, etc., that you have quoted from or referred to in your report. Do not include books you read but never cited. A recommended style of referencing is the Harvard System:

<http://www.bell.uts.edu.au/referencing/harvard5.html>

Appendix (optional)

This includes material which would interrupt the flow of the discussion if placed in the body of the report.

FOR MORE ADVICE ON ACADEMIC WRITING:

- The BELL Program Academic Writing Guide, University of Technology, Sydney: <http://www.bell.uts.edu.au/bells/acwriteguide.shtml>
- UTS Faculty of Business (1999). *Guide to Writing Assignments*. Sydney.

© Laurel Evelyn Dyson 2003. Anyone is welcome to use or share this guide although the author should be acknowledged.