

FORMAL REPORT WRITING

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What is a Formal Report?

- A document prepared following a fixed procedure
- Used to describe an investigation and give results and recommendations based on it
- Formal reports contain information with more detail and content than the shorter report forms (memo)
- A formal report is usually submitted at the end of any major investigation



Parts of a Formal Report

- Title
- Summary (Optional)
- Introduction
- Findings
- Conclusions
- Recommendations



Example of a Report

Title

- Should be specific
- Convey useful information about the content of the report
- Followed by names of authors and date it was finished

E.g.

Survey of First Year Students at University of Colombo School of Computing: 2011-2012

University Student Survey Committee,
August 11, 2013

Summary

- Optional
- Briefly state
 - aim of the report
 - describe the methodology followed
 - group conclusions of the investigation to categories

E.g.

1. Summary

A survey of the first-year students of the University of Colombo School of Computing (UCSC) was carried out to identify the problems they face. Students were surveyed on several matters. Majority expressed satisfaction with the university whereas a few areas of concern were identified.

Parts of an Introduction

- What is to be investigated
- Who requested the report
- When it was requested
- What methodology is to be used (should be indicated last)
- **Tense:** Past tense. Use present tense for aims/goals

E.g.

2. Introduction

The main purpose of this survey is to identify ways of improving effectiveness of education for the first years of UCSC.

This report was requested by the director of UCSC on December 1st, 2012. A university student survey committee was formed, consisting of the Director, Deputy Director, Student Counselor and Registrar. The committee was asked to submit its findings by September 1st, 2013.

The committee constructed a questionnaire aiming at extracting information from the students who have been first year undergraduates within the period of 2011-2012. Copies of this questionnaire are available at the UCSC Library. A total of 112 students answered the questionnaire and out of this 100 were usable responses. 118 students were registered as first year undergraduates in 2011-2012. Hence these responses can be taken to reflect the views of a significant majority of this batch of students. The questionnaire included 20 variables categorized into 6 groups.

- Information received from UCSC before their arrival to the university
- The student's reception into the university
- The courses and lectures at UCSC
- Interaction with staff and senior students
- Learning resources
- Food and accommodation

Findings

- Facts discovered by using the methodology described in the introduction
- **Tense:** Past tense. Passive voice is commonly used

E.g.

3) Findings

3.1 Before the arrival at UCSC

Students were inquired whether they have received thorough, partial or no information about UCSC, their chosen programme of study and campus culture. Results suggest that sufficient information was provided on the above-mentioned aspects.

3.2 After the arrival at UCSC

Using a scale of unsatisfied, satisfied or very satisfied, students were asked to rate five aspects of their arrival and stay at UCSC. A considerable number of responses suggested that hostel facilities and time allocated for English lessons need improvement.

Conclusions

- Statements of fact derived from findings
- **Tense:** Present Simple or Present Perfect Tense

E.g.

4) Conclusions

This survey of the first-year undergraduates of UCSC within the period of 2011-2012 shows why UCSC is a destination sought by many youngsters for their higher education. However, two main concerns have been highlighted.

4.1 The hostel facilities provided have been insufficient.

4.2 Not enough teaching time has been allocated for English lessons.

Recommendations

- Suggestions of how the problems can be solved
- Often contains the word, should
- Verbs with should be in active voice or passive voice

E.g.

5) Recommendations

Based on the survey results, the committee makes the following recommendations

- 5.1 The university should allocate a spacious building for hostel facilities
- 5.2 The first-year timetable should have more time allocated for English lessons

MEMO WRITING

What is a Memo?

- Memorandums, or memos for short, are used in place of formal letters for internal communication.
- These may be used in the workplace to present information, to provide directions or reminders, or to propose an idea.
- The message is straightforward.
- Reader will get the message immediately.



Before you write

➤ Before you put anything on paper, consider the following first:

Audience

Who are the intended recipients of your memo? Knowing your audience will not only allow you to identify who to address it to, but also determine the tone of the document you will be writing.

Purpose

The purpose of the memo will also affect how you write the document. Providing a list of instructions will require a more formal and professional tone, while an announcement regarding a company outing or party may be written in a festive manner.



Parts of a memo

Memo formats may differ depending on the workplace. Most, however, have the following parts:

Label

Some offices require for this document to bear the label “MEMORANDUM” or “MEMO” at the top of the page so that your readers will immediately know what type of document it is. However, not all workplaces have this rule. Do make it a point to study the standard memo format followed in your office so you can adjust accordingly.

Heading

The memo heading contains the following details:

- **To:** This is where you write down the recipients of the memo.
Addressees may be colleagues (do write their full names and job titles) or units or departments within the office.
- **From:** Write down your name and job title
- **Subject:** Indicate the reason for the memo
- **Date:** Note the complete date

Body

- Use this section to provide the relevant details regarding the issue. Try to be as specific and concise as possible.

Conclusion

- The conclusion is usually just 1-2 sentences long and indicates what action you are expecting from the recipient of the memo.

Tips to be effective at memo writing

➤ Be SMART. Memos should be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. Be clear not only about what you want to say, but what you expect your reader to do.

➤ Don't use informal language.

Memos, by their nature, need to be written in a professional manner. As such, do avoid colloquial language.

➤ Be brief.

Memos should go straight to the point. Avoid flowery language and adding unnecessary details so that your readers will know exactly what you're trying to say.

- Present the main point within the opening paragraph.
- Make it easier for your reader to understand what the memo is about by stating the gist of it within the first paragraph.
- Salutations are not necessary in memos.
- Break down the memo.
 - If your memo is long, consider breaking it down into smaller chunks to make it easier for your readers to understand what you want to say.
 - Consider using subheadings to break down sections of your memo. If, you want to raise several points in your memo, you use bullet points to make it easier for your readers to understand each specific issue that you will bring up.

- Don't use emotionally-charged words or language.
- Never use emotional words, even when writing about issues such as a team member's poor performance at work.
- Maintain professionalism. Use a polite tone.
- Proofread. Before you release the memo, make sure that you proofread it to see if there are any factual, grammatical, or spelling errors in what you wrote.
- You may also want to review it to see if there is a way for you to simplify it further to make it more easily understood by your audience.

Sample Memo

To: Jason Perera

From: Mileka Herath

Subject: New Application Forms

Date: January 4, 2010

Two new application forms will be ready for your use next week. The Executive Committee approved them late yesterday. I thought you would appreciate a follow-up report.

The Committee was grateful for the changes that you made to improve both forms. We are printing 500 of each form and should have them by Friday. Someone from shipping will deliver 250 of them to the plant so that you have them by Monday morning. We will keep the other half here for our use and as reserve.

Keshani Gamage is updating the electronic versions. She will contact you yet this week so that you can test them online before they are uploaded on Monday.

Thanks again, Jason, for your suggestions. Contact me if you have any questions.

Best Regards,

Mileka Herath

References

- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/professional_technical_writing/memos/index.html
- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/professional_technical_writing/memos/format.html
- <https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/writing-business-memos>
- <https://www.kean.edu/~cpdonova/HowtoWriteaMemo2.pdf>