Preparation of Research Report

Research Report

A report is simply a statement or description of things that have already occurred. It is concise, clear communication of the important findings of the research work. Reports communicate information which has been compiled as a result of research and analysis of data and of issues. Reports focus on transmitting information with a clear purpose, to a specific audience. Good reports are documents that are accurate, objective and complete. They should be well-written, clearly structured and expressed in a way that holds the reader's attention and meets their expectations.

A research report has a special feature in that it conveys information to the evaluator about the entire activities you had undertaken during the research process. It is the only truly effective way in which you can communicate with your examiners or evaluators about the interesting findings of your work and the new knowledge you have generated.

Purpose and Importance of Research Reports

■ It is a means whereby the data, analysis and conclusions are placed in an organized form. These information can be used both for academic and application purposes.

■ Your research work will be judged mainly by the quality of the report. The examining committee may not see your effort while at field. Your research report is the "only tangible product" of hundreds of hours of work. Therefore, you should show your performance, skills, and thoughts in your report, as these are vital to its assessment and grading.

■ The effectiveness of the report may be judged by its use. The organizations, professors, researchers and students are using good reports for different purposes. Report writing may benefit you in any of the following ways, although the relative importance of each will change as the program of work progresses:

■ To see whether you are on target with your work, so that any problems can be spotted in time to be attended to.

■ To provide an opportunity for you to reflect on progress, consolidate arguments and identify any gaps in knowledge, data or methodology.

■ To help you to develop an appreciation of standards and hence to learn to monitor your own progress.

■ To provide practice in academic report writing and academic discourse, so that any additional training which may be necessary in this report can be supplied at an early stage.

■ To form a basis, in due course, for your project work and possibly a journal article.

Research Report Process

There are five steps in the research reporting process. At the top, we have raw data collected from different sources. The data is then passed through different stages of compression. Given figure highlights this report process.
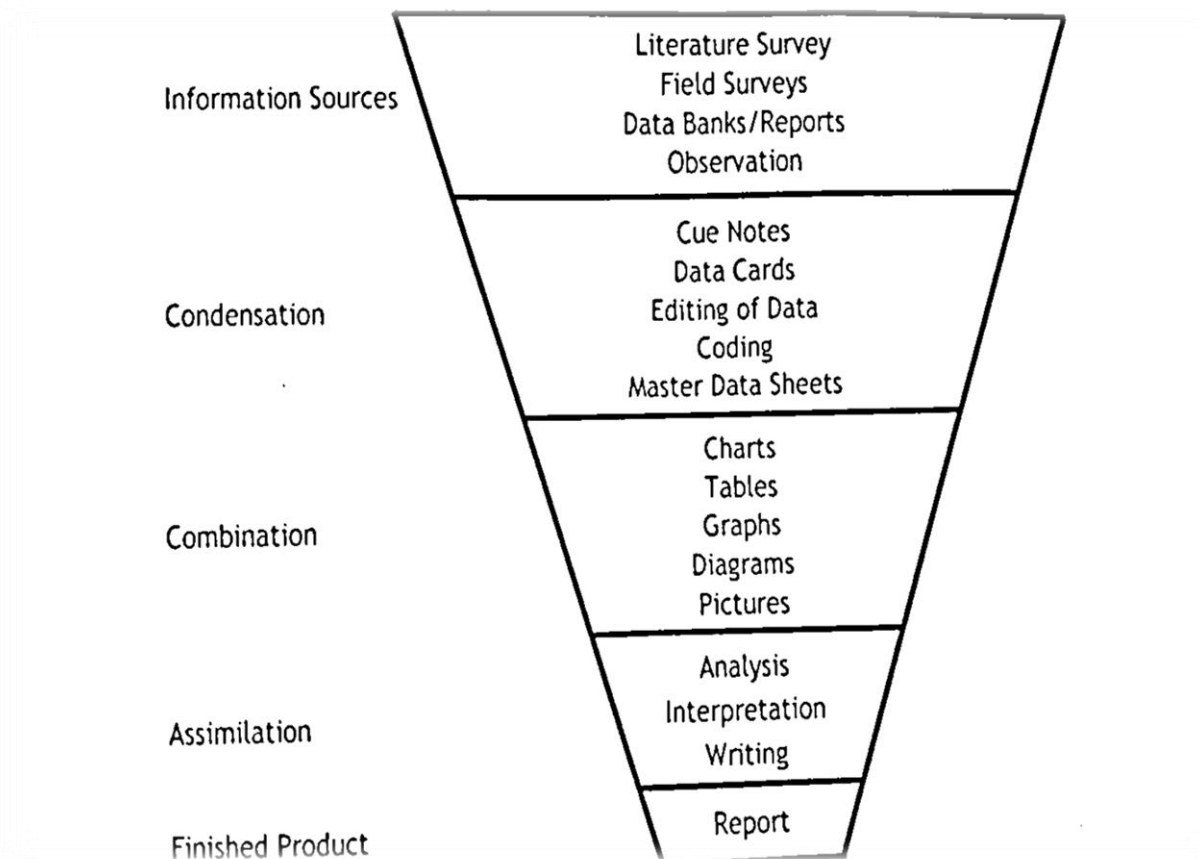
Types of Research Reports

Research reports prepared for a business situation may be of various types. These reports could be classified as: (a) formal-informal, (b) written-oral, (c) internal-external, (d) short-long, (e) informational-analytical, and (f) technical-popular. All of these types of reports have their own formats and conventions. For the purpose of thesis/dissertation, reports can be classified into two functional groups: (a) descriptive, and (b) analytical.

Descriptive Reports

Descriptive reports are description of facts, trends or opinions gathered by you in course of your investigation. The presentation and analysis of facts in an organized way may be of real value in properly understanding the situation. These reports indicate the current situation and the nature of the problems facing the organization under study and also indicate the reforms required to overcome the problems.

Analytical Reports

Analytical reports go one step further than descriptive reports. These reports, in addition to presenting facts and statistics, interpret this information in relation to the problem under consideration. Focused on a single or limited area of the problem, these reports follow the process of scientific investigation and reporting. These reports also recommend the actions to be taken for improvements in the situation. You may choose any one of these types of reports. The choice of the types would depend on the nature of your investigation..

Procedures for Report Writing

There are no set rules for writing a research report. A procedure that works well for one person may not work so well for another.

Analyze the Task

As with any assignment task, you might first analyze what is expected of you. This careful reading of the assignment task as outlined in your courses of instruction. You may find the following questions useful when analyzing the task:

I.   What is the purpose of the report?
II.   What should I look up?
III.   Who will read my report?
IV.   What is the word limit?
V.   What is the expected format of the report?

Prepare Outline

In view of your task analysis and the data that you have collected, you can draw an outline of reporting prior to actually starting the write up. An outline is a roadmap to keep you from getting lost when you start to write. This will help you in arranging ideas in a better way. This will also enable you to see broadly which information you want to communicate and how the various points are related to one another. Thus, for effective report writing, it is essential to plan its contents well.

Plan Your Time

The campus/college decides the date of report submission. Therefore, you may not have enough time to work at ease. As you have to meet the time schedule, it is always better for you to plan the available time accordingly. Delays in submission of the research report may cause problems for the student as well as the campus/college.

Arrange Data

You may have collected the data from different sources. The raw data need to be processed and tabulated first. After some editing work is done, the data would be somewhat revealing. You then have to arrange the data in some sequential order for meaningful presentation. The better you organize and arrange the data, the better the data will be revealing.

Start Writing

In writing, the beginning is often difficult. You may begin with the introduction and proceed through to the conclusion. But it is always better to start writing the sections, which appear to be especially easy. This would increase the enthusiasm for the task and enhance your level of confidence.

Prepare the First Draft

You should never expect to produce the excellent report in the first attempt. This may not even be possible for experienced writers. Therefore, it is better-to prepare the draft first. Then you can rewrite where necessary.

Put the Report aside for a Day or Two

After preparing the first draft, you can keep the report aside for a day or two and can do some other work. Forgetting about the report for a day or two can be very beneficial. Then you review the report afresh, almost as objectively as another person. If you find weaknesses, you can remove or correct them.

Review and Rewrite

In any report, there is always some scope for improvement. You must review your work in terms of the format and style of reporting. You must ensure that you have followed the format and style prescribed by your campus/college. You should also review your work to identify any errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, etc. Revision or editing is not the same as re-writing the whole thing from scratch. What you are doing is taking a close and careful look at each word, sentence, and paragraph to make sure you have made the best choices.

Style of Report Writing

We have discussed some points, which should be kept in mind while preparing the report. At the same time, attention should also be given to style of writing. Writing style is much more an art than a matter of rules. We can, therefore, suggest only some broad guidelines.

Write Clearly

The sentence must be as simple as possible. Two or three relatively simple sentences may convey an idea more clearly than one complicated sentence. Similarly, you should not write long paragraphs. You should divide the material into separate paragraphs and use sub-headings, if necessary, to highlight important separate points. The words used must express precisely what you want to say. Finally, you must make sure that the report has uniform style and format.

Adhere to the Study Objectives

You should focus on the research problem. The main purpose of the research investigation is to answer the questions that derive from the statement of objectives. The findings or a simple piece of writing without reference to the objective may be a futile exercise.

Be Careful of Terminology, Grammar and Spelling

The fundamental medium of communicating one's findings is words. Therefore, you should give adequate attention to the correct use of grammar and to the correct spellings of all wordy Similarly, appropriate punctuation marks must also be used according to the standard rules' and not arbitrarily.

Be Selective

Research reports cannot include everything known on the given subject. If an attempt is made to include too much, there is always danger that the important points will be lost in the detail. Unnecessary accumulation of materials may distort the focus. Hence, you should make good judgment as to what materials to include in the report and what to exclude.

Be Objective

Objectivity is an important determinant of the quality of a research report. Hence, objectivity should be maintained in your research methods and interpretations. You must at all times retain your objectivity. In other words, facts should determine conclusions. Objectivity is essential because it is necessary that others be able to understand and replicate a finding before it is considered dependable. Hence, extra caution should be taken to keep the research reporting process bias-free.

Draw Conclusions Students often confuse conclusions with research findings. Findings state facts. Conclusions represent inferences drawn from the findings. Findings are just like threads in

a handloom. These threads need to be woven, intermixed and converted into a finished product called conclusion..

Conventions of Academic Writing

There are certain conventions of academic writing. Hence, it is suggested that the academic and project report writing should follow these basic norms and conventions. Moreover, a written research report is the means by which you present your work to the world. It is therefore worth taking a lot of care over its design and writing.

Make Direct and Positive Sentences

You should not use unessential words and phrases. You should avoid unnecessarily long, technical, or unusual words or phrases. Thus, well-constructed sentences are a mark of skill in writing. In writing a report, you should write naturally and directly using familiar words, short sentences with simple constructions.

Presentation

Charts, sections, sub-sections, tables etc. should be labeled adequately. The system of headings and subheadings should be kept simple. The report must be a coherent whole; it must be a tightly woven fabric of facts and ideas - of sections, subsections, paragraphs and sentences. The sequence of the sections and subsections should be logical and clear. The introduction, data analysis and findings are to be in the past tense; conclusion in the tense; and recommendations in the future tense.

Use of the First Person

The report is to be written in the third person. The pronouns such as I, my, mine, our, ours, We, us and me should be eliminated from the report. If required to refer to yourself, you use the Words "the writer" or "the investigator".

Use Gender-neutral Language

When writing a research report, it is very important to select terminology which treats both genders equally. You should not make assumptions about one gender as opposed to the other. When reporting empirical data in a project work, however, there may often be instances where it is necessary to refer to the gender of a respondent. In such instances, the use of the relevant pronoun, he or she, may be appropriate and even necessary for the reporting of the research.

Avoid Emotional Terms

Instead of writing "Sales increased tremendously", "The increase was fantastic" or "The amazing increase was attributed to... ", simply state the percentage of increase in sales. By so doing, you are neither passing judgment nor trying to make the reader pass judgment.

Label Opinions

Generally, facts are strongly preferred over opinions. Sometimes, however, opinions add conviction. The opinions of specialists may be available when facts from research are not available. When presenting opinions, you can reveal the background and identity of the person presenting the opinion. Sometimes, data are such that no solid conclusion can be drawn, or a variety of explanations could exist. In such cases, opinions can strongly substantiate your explanations and conclusions.

Use of Notes and Footnotes

It is sometimes necessary to include in a project report additional material which it is felt to be inappropriate to place in the main text. This kind of material may be information which is supplementary to the principal arguments of the text. Such material may be included in footnotes at the bottom of the relevant page, or in notes at the end of each chapter.

Non-English Terms and Expressions

Non-English terms are sometimes used in project research reports. The terms which are used regularly in English should not be italicized. However, an expression such as chakka jam would probably be italicized. When using an expression from another language, it is worth considering whether it is likely to be understood by most readers.

English and American Spellings The issue which occurs most commonly in academic writing is the selection of the form of verbs which can end in either Ise' or `ize'. In English academic writing, the latter form is the norm. Examples of such regularly used words in research include hypothesize, synthesize, and socialize. However, both these formats are equally acceptable. You should use one spelling format consistently.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations should be used sparingly. When inserted in the text to any great extent, they have the effect of breaking up the text, and making it more difficult to read. The reader may forget the meaning of some of the abbreviations and need to turn back regularly to consult the glossary. When the abbreviation is used for the first time, then the full form of the term should be given first, followed by the abbreviation in brackets afterwards. From that point onwards, the abbreviation may be used on its own.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

As far as possible, you should try to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. If the research involves any type of case study, then it is possible to use fictional names. The main advantage in this is that it gives the report an air of reality.

Consistency

While writing, consistency in the spellings, abbreviations, style, etc. should be maintained. It is therefore to make a choice of format, and then to abide by that choice throughout the report. Even slight variations in practice, can be an irritant for the evaluators of your thesis.

Typing the Research Report

Writing a report requires special writing skills and knowledge of format. Now that the word-processing equipment is becoming common, reports can be typed quickly and efficiently from relatively rough drafts. Word processors can make the typing work easy and fast. The following guidelines are given for typing the report:

Paper

For the purpose of typing white Xerox paper may be used. The size of the paper should be 8.6 by 11 inches. Only one side of the paper is to be used.

Chapter Page

The chapter number is centered about two inches from the top of the page. Following to spaces below should be the title of the chapter in capital letters. The first line of the text should begin four spaces below that title.

Margins

Margins indicate the boundaries of the text. APA specifies 1-inch margins all around (top, bottom, left, and right).

Spacing

The text of the report should be double-spaced. Indented, quotations and footnotes should be single-spaced. Same style and size of font should be used throughout the report.

Page Number

Page number should come at the top right hand corner of the page, one inch from the top edge and one inch from the right-hand edge of the page. The first line of the text should be two spaces below the page number.

Pagination

Pages should be numbered consecutively in Arabic numerals from the first page of the text to the end of the manuscript (including the appendices). The pages in the introductory sections (preface, table of contents etc.) should be numbered with small Roman numerals i, ii, iii, iv, v, etc., one inch from the bottom of the page. All page numbers should stand alone without periods, hyphens or. dashes.

Proofreading

The manuscript should be read critically, searching for inaccurate statements, wrong entries' omissions and inconsistencies. After verifying and locating errors in quotations, footnotes, tables, figures, paragraphing, sentence structure, headings, spellings, style, bibliography, mark the copy to provide the typist with necessary directions for providing a satisfactory transcript.