

The Structure of a Project Report

The project report would normally be organised as follows:

Cover pages – COMPULSORY

Download the relevant MS-Word document using the links provided in the module's Blackboard page. The document contains a template for the cover page of your project, which you must edit to provide your project details; it also contains two declaration pages which you must review, edit and sign. Submitting your work for assessment means that you implicitly agree with the statements made in the two declarations.

Abstract – COMPULSORY

This is a statement that describes in a concise way the whole of your project work. It should be one of the last things that you should produce in relation to your project, as it should encapsulate what is actually in your project report.

The abstract should summarise in not be more that 250 words the problem tackled, the method adopted / approach taken, the main findings / results obtained and conclusions; it must not contain any references and it should be written in such a way that it should provide a reader with sufficient information about the nature and scope of the work that follows in order to enable him/her decide on whether the chapters that follow are worth reading.

Acknowledgements – OPTIONAL

Sometimes people feel they should acknowledge various people for their help in delivering the project. If you believe that you need to include such a section, then this is the place to put it.

Content Pages – COMPULSORY

There are different contents pages which can help a reader through a report. As a minimum you should include a contents page that will list the various chapters, sections and subsection headers along with the pages these appear in your report. Lists of Tables, Figures, etc. can also be useful and it should be included in projects where a reader may find their existence useful in appreciating the work.

If you have made a good use of your word processor then producing content pages in the required format, with the required level of information and keeping them up-to-date should be something rather simplistic.

Body of the Report – COMPULSORY

This is the place where you present your work. Your writing should be concise and to the point and you should always bear in mind (a) that quantity does not necessarily mean quality and (b) that you are assessed on the quality of your report.

Typically, a project report (excluding cover pages, acknowledgements, abstract, tables of contents, references and appendices) should be between 10,000 and 15,000 words long. To restrict/control the length of your reports penalties will be applied to project reports that exceed the above word limits (for more details see the section on Formatting and Typesetting Guidelines). In truly exceptional circumstances, your supervisor may allow you to produce a longer report, but in all such cases your supervisor must write to the chair of the Assessment Board to justify the need for the submission of such a lengthy report.

Although there is no single recipe that prescribes how the main body of your report should be structured, writing a project report should be seen as telling a story, i.e. your report should have a beginning, a middle and an end. Typically, the main body of your report should be organised into a number of chapters. Chapters should be numbered sequentially, starting with Chapter 1. Each chapter should consist of a number of sections and each section from a number of subsections. It would be nice if sections/subsections within a chapter are also numbered. The writing style should be such that it should emphasise the main findings, contributions of the work carried out along with any possible limitations.

In most cases, the first chapter is an introduction to the work that follows; in this chapter you describe briefly what your project is about, why it is an interesting and important topic to investigate and you critically review any related work others may have done; in this chapter you should also provide a road-map to the rest of the report, i.e. what each of the chapters covers.

An essential part of your project that helps “lift” your project’s academic level is the Review / Survey of Literature and Related Works; it is the part where you (a) demonstrate your knowledge of the topic(s) relevant to your project and (b) locate your work in the context of the rest of the literature. This normally has the form of a chapter in which you introduce and discuss the theories, concepts and work of others that you use (or have rejected/dismissed) in your project. The chapter gives you the opportunity to demonstrate how your work fits with the work others did; it also gives you the opportunity to review and evaluate these in relation to your project, making sure that the extent of your contribution is emphasised. The review should be directed towards the topics and the themes your project tackles and under no circumstances it should be a general textbook review.

Quite frequently the literature review chapter is followed by a chapter where you set, in a clear and coherent way, the objectives of your project against the reviewed background and where you summarize the approach you will be taking in achieving these objectives providing a justification of the chosen approach against a range of possibilities.

In the chapters that follow, you normally present the theory / approach you used in your project, the solution / implementation you developed and your findings. Thus, depending on your project you should discuss issues related to your

Requirements Analysis and Specification – how your project’s specification was devised, possible communication with the various stakeholders, any constraints, the rationale for the choices you made, the specification itself, and the initial work schedule;

Design – your design approach/method/process and its outcome(s), the rationale for various design decisions and trade-offs made, your choice of algorithms employed, your data modelling/architectures and implementation environments;

Implementation – choice of any packages, tools, development environments and language;

Testing – whether and how the artefact you devised was tested or evaluated, the extent in which the specification has been satisfied;

Findings – presentation of your findings/results; which should be presented in a neutral and factual way without making an effort to interpret them.

In most cases, the last couple of chapters of a project report provide a critical appraisal of the work carried out and a self-evaluation of the way the project was approached. This is an essential aspect of a project that examiners expect to see and it should involve (a) a critical summary of the work itself; (b) an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the work carried out, incl. identification of the weaker aspects of the work, what has been achieved and what not, what could have been done differently; (c) an analysis and interpretation of the findings and results (i.e. you reflect on your findings/results, and you provide your own interpretation of what has been observed or achieved in relation to what you have set as your project’s objectives); and/or (d) recommendations for possible further investigation/work.

These chapters typically begin with a discussion of all that has gone before, possibly emphasising earlier points which, at a later stage, turned out to be important. Any discrepancies between your findings and the work of others should be explained, or at least identified. Any new results should be clearly stated. Directions for further work should be given, and any outstanding problems should be described.

Finally remember, writing up your project report is only part of the work. You should try to take full advantage of the features your word processor gives you (spell checkers, grammar and language checkers, thesaurus, bibliography programs, etc.) to improve the quality of your writing. You should also try to address issues such as grammar, syntax, inconsistencies and use of language possibly by asking a friend to read and review your work.

References and Bibliography – COMPULSORY

Citations and references is an essential element of your report that examiners expect to see. Citations should appear in the text of your report, whereas references should be listed, at the end, in a reference list or a bibliography section. Citation and referencing should be done consistently throughout your report, follow the same format and provide all the required bibliographical information; for more information on how to cite and reference using examples, you are strongly

advised to consult/refer to the [referencing guide](#). The recommended citation and referencing style is a variation of the Harvard author-date citing and referencing style; to find out more, you should check the [Referencing your Work](#) booklet that can be found in the library's internet pages.

Appendices – OPTIONAL

You do not have to have appendices in your report, but as appendices contain information that supports your work/findings, it is very likely that you will need to use them.

It is up to you to judge what you will put in the appendices and what you will include in your report. As a guide you should include in appendices material that is not essential to appreciate your work, that a reader (examiner) of your report would not be expected to read, but which, in your view, enhance the content and complement your work and. What you should definitely NOT do is to use appendices as a way of extending the length of your report (to overcome the set wordcount).

Examples of what can be included in an appendix can be a User Guide. A User Guide is not an essential part of your work, it does not describe your work/findings; however, including a User Guide in your report as an appendix can provide more detailed information about the way your prototype can be used (if included then it should be kept brief, not explaining the obvious). Another example of a possible appendix can be your project proposal, especially if as part of your report you compare and contrast your findings/results to the objectives you had set in your proposal.

Finally remember, researchers often read the abstract and the conclusions of a paper to decide whether it is worth reading the whole paper; thus, you should put effort to make these as self-contained and readable as possible. The conclusions are also the last thing examiners read, so be sure to leave them with the impression of a well-researched project.

Plagiarism and how to avoid it

The use of words, ideas or work of other people and passing them off as your own (i.e. without acknowledgement), is considered a form of cheating (assessment misconduct). Hence, whenever you use some other book or article (even if you change the words slightly) you are required to cite the source. Moreover, copying an un-attributed odd paragraph or quotation or a diagram/figure from a public source, including the internet; copying, without acknowledgement, material from other people, e.g. colleagues; copying or reuse of designs, programs, or other source material without acknowledgement; submission of work jointly produced with someone else as if it were entirely your own work constitutes plagiarism. Thus, the correct use of citation & referencing enables you to

- acknowledge that the work/idea belongs to another person;
- provide evidence of your own work/research;
- illustrate a particular point;
- support your arguments and/or theory;
- allow others to locate the resources you have used; and to

- avoid accusations of plagiarism, but also to:

The University employs text-matching software, such as Safe Assign and Turnitin, to help identify and detect potential cases of plagiarism; as the software does not detect plagiarism per se but does highlight text similarities, examiners are required to comment on the reported similarities of your project report, decide whether or not potential plagiarism exists and whether the case should be reported for academic misconduct for further investigation. If you are reported for academic misconduct you will face disciplinary procedures the outcome of which can ultimately result in your expulsion from the University. For more info on academic misconduct incl. penalties, visit the following page: www.westminster.ac.uk/academic-misconduct.

The following simple points can help avoid being accused of plagiarism:

- Give credit in the “Acknowledgments” section of your report to colleagues or others who may have helped you with your project work explaining what their help contribution to your project is/was; this way you can state what is your own work and what is the work of others.
- Try to avoid using quotations and if this is not possible use them sparingly; if you quote directly from a source, then you should surround the quotation with quotation marks and cite precise source (i.e. the author’s surname, year of publication and the page number of the quotation, or URL and the date you visited it) either in parentheses directly after the quotation or in a footnote. Any figures, tables, drawings that you have taken from other sources and included in your report need to be treated as quotations.
- Irrespective of the sources you have used, the structure and presentation of the argument should be your own. If you are using electronic sources, please do not cut/copy and paste sections into your work.
- Try to avoid re-using any part of work you have submitted for an assignment elsewhere. If you have to look back at old assignments for information
 - ◇ do not copy and paste;
 - ◇ rephrase /make minor changes to your answer;
 - ◇ make a brief note of the information beforehand and work from that note;
 - ◇ reference any work you re-use (even if it is your own).
- If you are reusing code or design information from another source, never remove any annotation that identifies the original author, even when you are modifying the code.