

Title: Writing a Report

Author: Dr Ray Stoneham

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School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences



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## **1. Introduction**

Reports are widely used in industry and commerce to circulate information. In any large organisation, those in charge have to base their decisions on the most up-to-date and accurate information that is available. This usually comes to them as a report produced to a clearly defined standard company format.

Reports are designed so that they do not necessarily have to be read in full. The title page, terms of reference, abstract and contents page should show to the reader whether the report is of interest, whether it should be read in full, or whether its main recommendations should be noted and the main body of the text skimmed over.

As in technical writing, the language used should be clear, precise and objective. The general layout of the report should help the reader to take in the information quickly and easily.

Bearing in mind that there is scope for variation, and that this depends on the judgement of the writer, the following guidance notes may be used as a model for the layout of a typical business report. In some cases it is necessary to follow a specified layout (eg for an undergraduate or postgraduate project follow the guidelines given to you, for a company report follow that company's own guidelines).

## **2. Report layout**

### **2.1 Pagination**

All pages except the Front Sheet should be paginated with the page number appearing at the bottom of each page. The Front Sheet is page 1.

### **2.2 Headers**

Each page from page 2 onwards should include a header line or lines containing a short title for the report and, optionally, the author's or company's name.

### **2.3 Margins/Justification**

Wide margins are used to give space for the reader to add their own handwritten notes to the text and to allow for binding of the report. Right-hand justification is optional.

### **2.4 References**

All work from other sources must be acknowledged. References are made using an author/date system. Full details of the references are placed after the appendices section in the Bibliography of material consulted.

### 2.4.1 Quoting from a source

If a quotation is less than a line in length then it can be put in speech marks within the body of the text. If the quotation is longer than a line then:

.....  
.... as supported by Anthony who stated:  
  
" .....  
....."  
  
..... (Anthony, 1965, p. 23)  
.....

The quotation must be exactly as in the source and the quotation is displayed indented by approximately 5 characters from both sides compared to the previous text. The page number(s) in the source document must be given.

### 2.4.2 Acknowledging a source

The same method is used even if you are not quoting word-for-word from the source:

.... as shown by Anthony (Anthony, 1965, p. 35), ....

## 3. Report content

A report should contain the following:

### 3.1 Front sheet

This shows:

Title of the report  
Author's name  
Date of submission  
Authorisation  
Distribution list

A graphic is not usually used unless it enhances the report (e.g. a company logo).

### 3.2 Table of contents

This lists every section and subsection of the report (including the contents page itself), and shows the relevant page number for each section/subsection.

### **3.3 List of tables and illustrations**

This lists every table, figure, diagram, etc. used within the report with the relevant page number. Each table, etc. needs to be numbered.

### **3.4 Terms of reference**

This is also called the introduction or scope of the report. It sets out in about 50-150 words any limitations, definitions and other considerations that have been taken into account in the writing of the report and that are relevant to the reader's understanding of what is presented in the report.

### **3.5 Abstract**

This summarises in 50-150 words the entire report in brief, concentrating on the conclusions and recommendations.

### **3.6 Body of text**

#### **3.6.1 Content**

Take care to provide a logical, readable account that is easy to follow.

#### **3.6.2 Sections and sub-sections**

These should be clearly labelled and numbered. A logical approach using subsections and sub-subsections as demonstrated here is typical. All subsections should follow a consistent pattern.

##### **3.6.2.1 Order of presentation**

If the body of the report is to appear clear and logical, it is important that the sequencing of sections and subsections is worked out well in advance.

#### **3.6.3 Figures, tables, diagrams and plates**

If a figure, etc. is referred to only once in the report, it should be placed at the appropriate position within the text. It may interrupt the text, or be placed on a separate sheet within the text. Ensure that the figure, table, etc. is actually mentioned within the body of the text.

If a figure, etc. is referenced many times within the body of the text, it should be placed at the end of the report in an appendix.



Figure 1

Whether it is in the text or in an appendix, each figure, etc. must be numbered and referred to by that number in the text (e.g. all documents must have the logo as shown in Figure 1).

### 3.7 Conclusions

Conclusions should be brief and clear and be based only on material contained in the body of the text.

### 3.8 Recommendations

If recommendations can be made, they must be based firmly on information contained in the text.

### 3.9 Appendix

A separate appendix or appendices section may be included at the end of the report if appropriate. It is usual to put such things as price lists, technical specifications, figures and tables frequently referred to in an appendix. If there is more than one appendix they should be labelled as Appendix A, Appendix B, etc. Appendices are paginated either as a continuation of the numbering system of the main text, or as pages A1, A2, etc.

### 3.10 Bibliography

Any publications, magazine articles, journals, etc. used (whether referenced or not) must be acknowledged and full details given in the Bibliography.

Books are referenced using this format:

Anthony, R.N. (1965), *Planning and Control Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Harvard University Press: Boston.

Journal articles are referenced using this format:

Smith, J. (1991), "Using Harvard Graphics", *PC Plus*, Issue 27, pp. 34-38.

Note the use of italics for the book/magazine title. Use Anthony (1965a), Anthony (1965b), etc. if there are references to more than two items by the same author in the same year.

Web articles are referenced using this format:

Burka, L.P. (December 2000), "A Hypertext History of Multiuser Dimensions," MUD History,  
<http://www.ccs.neu.edu/home/home/lpb/mud-history.html>

Be sure to include all punctuation exactly as supplied (hyphens and tildes, in particular, are very common in Web addresses). Verify addresses you tag as URLs by copying and pasting them into your browser and seeing if the string of text actually takes the web user where it should.

The bibliography must be in alphabetical order by surname.