

# Report Structure

This report structure is intended to be used for a variety of reports. This can include a needs assessment for a client, an operational analysis, a request for additional resources, or to document an ongoing project. This general structure can and should be modified for your specific situation and the needs of the decision-maker or requester of the report. In addition, before starting to create your report, be mindful and aware of any style guides. A style guide may identify a particular naming or numbering convention, font choices, or layout. The structural elements of the report, in order, are:

- Report Cover
- Table of Contents
- Executive Summary
- Recommendations
- Report Content
- Conclusion
- Appendices

## Report Cover

A cover to your report might seem optional but including a cover is important for various reasons. It will establish the date the report was created or submitted as well as the status (e.g., Final Report – June 30, 2021 or Draft Report – February 1, 2020). It will also identify who the report is for and the title of the project. The report cover could also include the names of the authors and/or the department responsible for the report.

## Table of Contents

This is the reader's guide to the report and the overall report structure. Consider using subheadings within your report sections and utilize the Table of Contents feature.

## Executive Summary

Think of the Executive Summary as the mini version of your report. If the reader only reads this section, they should understand your process, challenges, solutions, and recommendations. In general, an Executive Summary should be short in comparison to the full report. Keep the key decision-maker in mind when writing this section.

## Recommendations

In addition to highlighting the recommended solution or approach, this section should include brief descriptions of the alternatives considered. Most of this will be repeated within the body of your report and will provide greater detail and data to support the recommendations. Like the Executive Summary, this section should be short in comparison to the overall report. Keep the key decision-maker in mind when writing this section.

## Report Content

This section contains the long-format description of your efforts and documents the focus of the effort, the solutions considered, the recommended alternative, and any cost/benefit calculations. Subheadings will be expected to take the reader through a logical organization of the work efforts. Use of data in this section is expected though a reliance on graphs, charts, and tables will be beneficial. Be sure to reference the appropriate appendix and data source used in calculations or generation of displays.

## Conclusion

Like the Executive Summary, this should be a distillation of the results of the effort you need to document. Inclusion of the “why” (purpose, beneficiaries, impetus) as well as the “how” (process to achieve benefits, implementation challenges, time frame) will help the reader and decision-maker gain a fuller understanding and context. Leave your target reader with a call to action.

## Appendices

For those efforts that generated more data or more detailed data that cannot be appropriately introduced in the body of the report, use appendices to provide the data. Use multiple appendices for different data types, sources, and elements to avoid any confusion.

Here are a few guidelines I like to remember when I write reports:

- Using acronyms is acceptable if you write it out the first time in any of the major report sections. The preferred style would be: Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Please note that KPIs has no apostrophe since it is a plural term, not possessive.
- Discuss the format and expectations of the report with the requesting party before you get started. This provides clarity and reduces the chance of re-work.
- Spelling, grammar, punctuation, and syntax matter. Use the tools your word processing program provides and remember that it may try to change technical terms or descriptions. Trust but be willing to ignore the recommended changes.
- Build in enough time in the schedule for internal reviews before submitting a “Draft” to the requesting party. By labeling the initial submittal as a draft, you send the message that changes can still be accommodated. When it’s final, stop worrying and celebrate the successes.