

What is a progress report?

A progress report is exactly what it sounds like – a document that explains in detail how you far you've gone towards the completion of a project.

It outlines the activities you've carried out, the tasks you've completed, and the milestones you've reached vis-à-vis your project plan.

Progress report

A progress report is typically written for a supervisor, colleagues, or client. You might write it on your behalf or work with your teammates to produce a team progress report.

Depending on the scope and complexity of the project, you might need to give a progress report weekly or monthly, or for every 25% project milestone.

Throughout your career, you're likely to be creating more reports than you can count (challenge for you: count them and find how much resources you're using!). Perhaps you find yourself spending more time crunching data and plugging numbers into graphs than actually working.

Why is a progress report important?

Sometimes it might feel like writing about your progress in detail is redundant, especially when you've been regularly communicating with your supervisor, teammates, and client throughout the course of the project.

But this kind of report is actually quite useful for several reasons.

It gets everyone on the same page

Each person who receives a copy of the report will know what has been accomplished. This prevents confusion about what has been or has yet to be done.

It facilitates collaboration

This is especially important when different teams work together. Knowing what the other team is up to helps prevent working in silos and also reduces task redundancy. It also helps one team identify areas where it can offer help or team up with others.

It improves transparency and accountability by providing a paper trail

When you submit your report, you've placed on record that you've accomplished a task or explained why your results were different than expected. Once the document has been accepted, it becomes part of the project's official documentation.

So, just in case someone accuses you in the future of failing to accomplish a task or not reporting a problem, you can point to the progress report as proof that you did so.

On the flip side, if your project ever gets nominated for an award, you can be sure validators will come seeking documents that explain how the entire thing was accomplished.

It improves project evaluation and review

Next time you plan for a project, your team can examine documents, including progress reports, of previous projects to find out what was done right, what went wrong, and what can be improved.

Previous reports can shed light on systemic issues, loopholes, and other causes of delay or failure – both internal and external – that must be avoided or resolved.

It provides insights for future planning

When the supervisor knows what tasks have been accomplished, he or she can focus on monitoring progress towards the next stages of the project.

When a report shows that delays have occurred, the supervisor is able to investigate the problems that hindered progress and take steps to prevent them from happening again in the future.

The supervisor will also be able to adjust the project timeline if absolutely needed, or instruct teams to double down.

How to structure a progress report

That's all well and good. But you may still be wondering about the exact process of how to write a progress report. Armed with all of these practical tips, how do you put the report together?

First, it depends on the type of report, as well as the intended reader. A progress report may be written daily, weekly, or monthly. It may be written for an individual or a team.

As you'll see in the examples below, the main parts of a progress report are:

1. Introduction

This part provides an overview of the contents of the progress report. It's best to write this after you've completed all the other parts of the report. That way, you'll be able to provide an accurate summary.

Keep it short and simple. One or two paragraphs will do.

2. Accomplishments

Numbers and details are your friends, especially when writing this section of the progress report. The accomplishments you write should correspond to your goals.

3. Goals

What were your goals for the period covered by the report? This could be a goal for the day, week, month, or quarter. On the other hand, it could be a team goal, too.

Be concrete when writing goals. For instance:

4. Roadblocks

Explain what situations, if any, prevented you from achieving your goals, or may prevent you from reaching this month's targets.

But don't stop there. Be proactive and present an action plan and timeline for resolving the roadblocks. Include details, such as funds, materials, and human resources you may need to implement the solution.