Report Writing

A report is a formal document based on facts which is usually submitted to higher officials. It describes and analyses a situation, so that the reader can understand and take specific actions. A good report writing calls for professionalism, profound knowledge of the subject, attentiveness, and outstanding writing proficiency.

A report provides an accurate, factual account of:
• What the writer has investigated   • How it was investigated
• What the findings are   • What the findings mean

<u>Types of Reports</u>

- <u>Long Report and Short Reports</u>: A long report is formal in nature which may run in thirty or more-pages and includes many elements. A short report is less formal which can be written in two pages using minimum up to five headings.

- <u>Internal and External Reports</u>: An internal report stays within a certain organization or group of people. External reports move outside the organization, these are public reports, e.g. the annual reports of companies or reports in a newspaper, such as any news item, an incident, sports etc.

- <u>Vertical and Lateral Reports</u>: A vertical report is for management of an organization where one works. The movement of this report can be in upward or downward direction. Lateral reports, on the other hand, assist in coordination in the organization, they move between units of the same organization level (for example, a report among the administration and finance departments).

- <u>Periodic Reports</u>: Periodic reports are sent out on regularly pre-scheduled dates. Mostly these reports move in upward direction and serve as management control. They include annual or quarterly or half-yearly reports. If they are frequently written, a pre-set structure is followed to fill in the data regularly.

- <u>Formal and Informal Reports</u>: Formal reports are meticulously structured. They focus on objectivity and organization, contain deeper detail, and the writer must choose a style and avoid use of personal pronouns. Informal reports are usually short messages with free-flow and use of simple format.

- <u>Informational and Analytical Reports</u>: Informational reports carry objective information from one area of an organization to maybe a larger system e.g. attendance reports, annual budget reports, monthly financial reports etc. Analytical reports show attempts to solve actual problems and require suggestions at the end e.g. scientific research, feasibility reports, employee appraisals etc.

- <u>Proposal Reports</u>: These kinds of reports are like an extension to the analytical/problem-solving reports. A proposal is a document one prepares to describe how one organization can provide a solution to a problem they are facing. The goal is usually solution-oriented.

- <u>Functional Reports</u>: These kinds of reports include marketing reports, financial reports, accounting reports, and a spectrum of other reports that provide a function specifically.

<u>Report Writing Format/ Elements of a Report</u>

A report has no personal bias or opinions; it can be written in both a long format and a short format as per the subject need and requirement. It can be divided into sections and sub sections to ensure clarity and emphasis.

A formal Long Report includes the following headings:

1. <u>Title page</u>
   The title page includes
   - the title of the report
   - the names and titles of the writers/ investigators/ compilers
   - the date of submission of the report
   - the name of the company or individual receiving the report.

2. <u>Table of Contents</u>
   The report should begin with a table of contents. This explains the audience, author, and basic purpose of the attached report. It should be short and to the point.

3. <u>Abstract/ Executive summary</u>
   An executive summary is a brief overview of a report that is designed to give the reader a quick preview of the report's contents i.e. key points or most significant information, conclusions or recommendations made. After reading the brief summary, the audience will understand the main points and the evidence for those points without reading the complete report.
   - Executive summaries are usually proportional in length to the larger work usually in 10 to 15 percent of original summarized in 1 to 2 paragraphs. An abstract is less than that.
   - The summary has to be concise gradually leading to conclusions
   - No new information has to be introduced in this section of the report
   - Executive summaries should communicate independently from the report.
   - This section is written after completing the report.

4. <u>Introduction</u>
   The introduction should:
   - briefly describe the context and background to the research/report
   - describe the change, problem or issue to be reported
   - define the specific objectives and purpose of the report
   - indicate the overall answer to the problem explored in the report
   - outline the report's scope (the extent of the investigation, also known as its terms of reference)

- Preview the report structure and comment on the limitations of the report and on assumptions that are made.

5. Methodology

This section includes the methods used to date collection, analysis and specific methods or procedures used to interpret or solve different problems related to the report.

6. Body Findings/ Discussion/

The body of the report describes the problem, discusses the data collected, tables or charts with reasons. It is divided into subsections, with subheadings that highlight   the further break down of a point as Findings/ Discussions
- Explain findings and back up claims with evidence.
- Persuade readers of the validity of stance taken.

This provides the readers clarity in understanding and further enhances the logical flow. The two key purposes of the **main body** of the report are:

i. to explain the conclusions   ii. to justify the recommendations.

7. Conclusion

The conclusion should:
- high light major conclusions first
- identify the major issues relating to the case and interpret appropriately
- relate specifically to the objectives of the report as set out in the introduction
- provide the list of numbered points
- follow facts in the discussion logically
- be brief clear and specific

8. Recommendations

Recommendations should be:
- action-oriented
- feasible
- logically related to the discussion and conclusion
- brief and arranged in order of importance
- numbered in case too many

9. References

Compile the list of reference   by giving credit to the articles, books and other material referred to in producing the report. This section includes lists of the resources used to research or collect the data for the report. References provide proof for points stated. It also provides a solid reasoning for the readers so that they can review the original data sources.

10. Appendices

This element includes essential additional technical information which supports the research/work. It is an explanation provided in the body and conclusion and supports the findings in the form of tables or charts or pictures, graphs or additional research not cited in the body but relevant to the discussion. Tables and figures must be labeled.

A **Short Report** includes the following elements:

1. Introduction
2. Discussion /Body
3. Findings
4. Conclusion
5. Recommendations

<u>Form, Layout and Writing style</u>
Professionalism in communication is determined by language and organization. It must be drafted with utmost care and personal opinions must not be included.

- The writing should be very crisp, clear, concise, and coherent with the usage of appropriate language, style and expressions, usage of grammar, and punctuation.
- A report should proceed in a logical manner with developed and cohesive paragraphs.
- Appropriate tense and sentence structures must be used.
- Use active voice rather than passive constructions, however passive voice is used in methodology section.
- Avoid using clichés, slang, and offensive language.
- Make it free of jargon; familiarize the audience with technical language or terms used if any in the report.
- A professional tone and formal style must be followed.
- Follow the format that is used in the respective field or company. E.g. some companies need the title of the report and year in the page header.
- Provide titles, headings, and subheadings as needed.
- Use bold and italics for those words or phrases that require extra attention.
- Use right space, heading, font, numbering consistently.
- Use bullets to organize large lists or large clauses.
- Proofread and finalize the report.
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