

# *Writing Reports*



# Objectives

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By the end of this lesson you will be able to demonstrate your learning and understanding of the

- Purpose of a report,
- Essentials components of a report,
- Structure and layout of a report,

by planning, researching and preparing a report for submission. This will be a graded assignment (group project).



# What is a Report?

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A report is communication of information or advice

- from a person who has collected and studied the facts
- to a person who has asked for the report because they need it for a specific purpose.

Often, the ultimate function of a report is to provide a basis for decision and action.

- A report presents research or defines a problem and draw conclusions about it.
- It makes recommendations for change or improvement.
- It records information for other people to refer to.



# The Purpose of a Report

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When writing reports, you need to understand what you are supposed to be covering, and why.

These instructions you receive ("***Terms of Reference***") will define the scope and limitations of your investigation.

The *Terms of Reference* (*TOR*) should be clear and agreed on before you start as they will provide you with the objectives of the report.

## Questions you need to ask before starting on a report:

- Why is the report required?
- Who exactly is it for?
- What do they want it to do?



# Reports – Fundamental Structure



- Title page
- Executive summary
- Acknowledgements
- Contents page
- List of tables and illustrations
- Introduction
- The main text (divided into sub-headings or sections)
- Conclusions
- Recommendations
- References
- Appendices

# Format



## ■ Title page.

- Title, author, student number, date of submission, module name and code, name of tutor.

## ■ Executive summary (Abstract).

- It contains a brief summary (50-100 words) of what the report is about and its objectives, who it is for, how it has been conducted, and its conclusions.
- An executive summary gives the reader a snapshot view of the contents.

## ■ Acknowledgements.

- List people you wish to thank for help given.

# Format



## ■ Contents page.

- List the sections and sub-sections of the report and the page on which each begins, including any appendices.
- The list should be numbered (note format for indenting).

E.g.

1.	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Background.....	1
1.2	Objectives.....	2
2.	Use of media in advertising.....	3
2.1	Global perspective.....	3
2.2	Sri Lankan perspective.....	4

## ■ List of tables and illustrations.

- List any illustrations, charts, maps, etc., giving the page number for each.

# Format



## ■ Introduction.

- Background to the study.
  - Terms of reference (TOR):
    - Who assigned the report to you?
    - Why the report was requested (purpose and objectives)?
    - The scope - what areas are covered in the report:
- Research methodology.
  - Describe the research methodology you used to gather information.  
(What methods did you use to gather information – questionnaires, interviews, books, internet, etc.,)

## ■ Body of the report: the text.

- This section contains details and information relating to the topic of your report– the facts. Briefly present your main research findings.



# Format

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## ■ Conclusions.

- Summarise your research, mentioning significant results and findings in relation to the objectives of the study.
- ***The conclusions should not include any new material that has not already been stated in the main body of the report.***

## ■ Recommendations.

- The purpose of recommendations is to suggest ways forward based on the findings detailed in your report.
- The recommendations could be for
  - Change.
  - Improvement.
  - New ideas.



# Format



## ■ List of References.

- List all the sources that you made reference to in your report, in alphabetical order.

**Note:** *References should be prepared using the Harvard style of referencing.*

## ■ Appendices.

- Appendices allow you to add supporting information to your report.
- You can provide statistical information (spreadsheets, forms, questionnaires, tables, charts, etc.) that support the content of your report.
- All material included in the appendices must be referred to in the text and should be essential to the report.

# Reports: Layout, Presentation, and Style



## ■ Numbered headings.

- Give each section a heading. Use brief subheadings to introduce different subject matter.
- Number each section and subsection in a logical way (note format for indenting).

E.g.

1	Introduction
1.1	First subheading
1.2	Second subheading
1.3	Third subheading

## ■ Pagination

- Roman numerals should be used for all the sections **before** the Introduction. (i, ii, iii)
- Arabic numerals should be used from the Introduction onwards.

# Reports: Layout, Presentation, and Style

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- Use fonts that are easy to read.
- Leave clear margins at each side.
  - (Left margin – 1.5")
  - (All other margins – 1")
- Do not use fancy graphics unless they are relevant to the report.
- Use a clear layout.
  - Avoid cluttering the report with tables and diagrams unless they are essential. This information can be placed in the appendices.



# Reports: Layout, Presentation, and Style

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## ■ Writing style.

- Formal – avoid slang and abbreviations.
- Focused – address only the project brief.
- Concise – avoid unnecessary details and examples.
- Subject-specific – use the style that is appropriate for the subject you are writing on.

## ● Writing, editing and proof-reading drafts.

See lecture notes on essay writing for details of preparing drafts and writing up the final documents.



# Some Tips

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- Use the spell check, grammar check, and thesaurus.
- Check if font sizes, colours, headings, etc. are consistent throughout the report.
- Check for consistency in numbering of sections and cross check with numbering on the contents page.
- Number illustrations or figures and add caption titles under them.
- Ensure that you reference sources appropriately to avoid plagiarism.



# Further Reading

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- The following link provides a sample student report, including comments and suggestions for improvement.

<https://www.monash.edu/learnhq/excel-at-writing/annotated-assessment-samples/business-and-economics/buseco-report-writing>



# References



- Cottrell, S., (2003). *The Study Skills Handbook*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Monash University, (2023). *BusEco: report writing*. [online]. Available from: <https://www.monash.edu/learnhq/excel-at-writing/annotated-assessment-samples/business-and-economics/buseco-report-writing>. [Accessed 19 June 2023].
- Samples Help, (2015). *Report Writing*. [online]. Available from: <http://www.samples-help.org.uk/report-writing/index.htm>. [Accessed 19 June 2023].
- Stanton, N., (2004). *Mastering communication*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.