

Writing a report



ACADEMIC LEARNING DEVELOPMENT

<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/learning-and-study-skills-support>

Contents

1. What is a report?
2. Comparison between reports and essays
3. Stages
 - planning your work
 - collecting your information
 - structuring your information
 - writing

What is a report?

- A report is a systematic, well organised document which defines and analyses a subject or problem, and which may include:
 - The record of a sequence of events
 - Interpretation of the significance of these events or facts
 - Evaluation of the facts or results of research presented
 - Discussion of the outcomes of a decision or course of action
 - Conclusions
 - Recommendations



- Reports must always be:
 - Accurate
 - Concise
 - Clear
 - Well structured



Feature	Report	Essay
Purpose	To communicate the results or findings of a project <i>To take decisions, e.g. policy</i>	Discursive, you can express your ideas and thoughts, and make judgements <i>To think...</i>
Language	Formal; concise and clear	Formal; more discursive, it often contains longer paragraphs and needs linking words and phrases to ensure cohesion
Structure	Formal. Broken up into different sections, each with their own headings and subsections	Generally using headings and subheadings but freer structure.

Source: University of Leeds, “Difference between an essay and a report” at

http://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/341/writing_skills/187/report_writing/4



Stages involved in writing a report:

1. Clarifying your terms of reference
2. Planning your work
3. Collecting your information
4. Organising and structuring your information
5. Writing the first draft
6. Checking and re-drafting

1. CLARIFYING YOUR TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of reference

- What exactly is your report going to be about?
 - If it is group work, who exactly is responsible for what?
 - How long have you got? What is your task timescale?
 - Why are you writing the report? What exactly are the assessment criteria?
 - Who are you writing the report for? Are you actually playing a role? What does your reader want to see?
- From Birmingham City University, “Study Guides: Writing”, at <http://library.bcu.ac.uk/learner/writingguides/1.27.htm>

Audience and Purpose

Identify the Audience and Purpose

- Think about who you are informing (the audience) and what information they need (the purpose). This will help ensure the relevance and clear focus of your report
- **For each of the following report briefs, identify:**
 - Who is the audience?
 - Why the report is needed?
 - What do the audience want to find out?



Activity – Report Brief

1. Write a report for the Students Union of your university on students' attitudes towards binge drinking.
2. Conduct the experiment into the elasticity of chewing gum, and hand in your lab report to your lecturer by 20th November.

For each of these, please identify:

- Audience?
- Why is the report needed?
- What do they want to find out?



Source: Learnhigher (2014)

http://archive.learnhigher.ac.uk/resources/files/Report%20Writing/Reports_Identify_Audience_And_Purpose_Activity.pdf

Example of terms of reference (1)

The terms of reference of the study are:

To prepare a strategy for the development of research in information technology (IT) in Australia over the next 10-15 years.

Scientific

1. To make recommendations for research in IT disciplines including computer science, software engineering, computer engineering, digital communications and information systems that will advance those disciplines and strengthen their contribution to the economic, social and scientific welfare of Australia;

2. To determine the degree to which a strong fundamental research base is required in all fields of information technology research in Australia and to recommend on future support for this research;

Example 1) continued...

Social and Economic

1. To assess the contribution of basic and applied IT research to the Australian information industries.
2. To evaluate the benefits of Australian IT research for Australian industry and for the well-being of Australian society, and to develop strategies to increase its contribution to both.

Education and Training

1. To characterise the current education and training of people engaged in IT research in the public and private sectors, and to identify any appropriate changes and their priorities.

Implementation

1. To identify methods for implementing its recommendations and strategies.

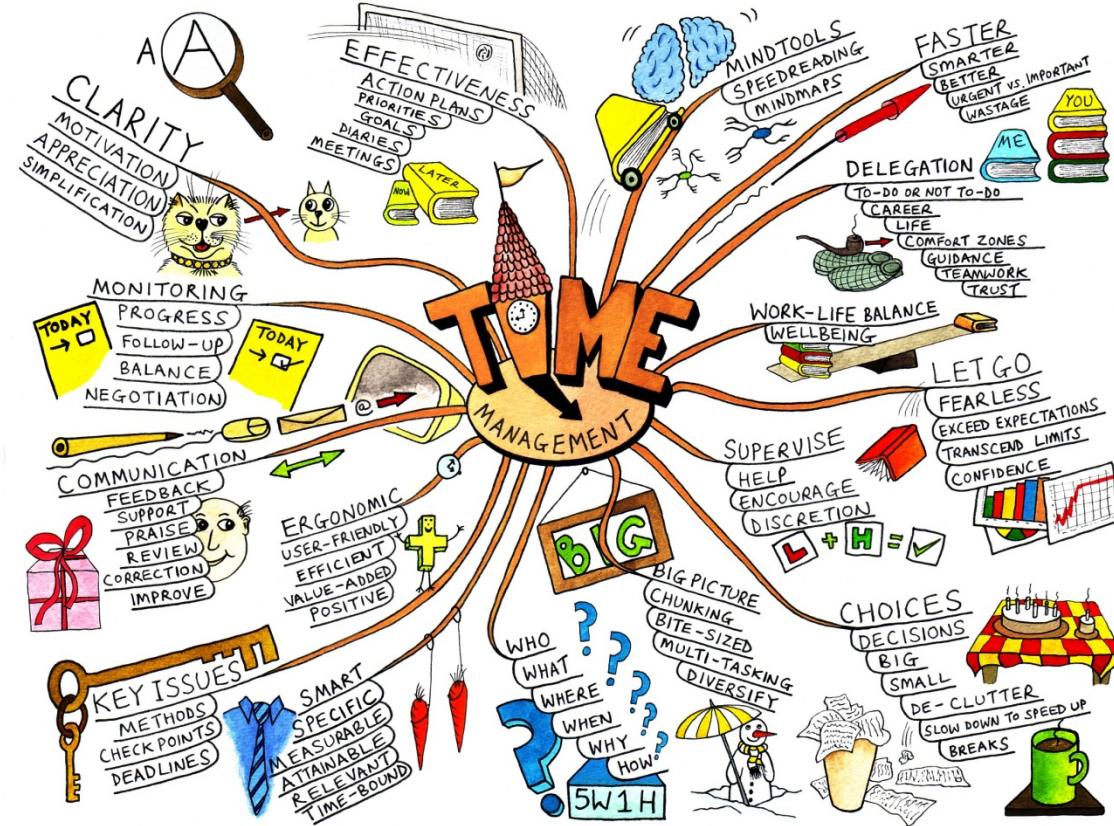
Example 2) of terms of reference

A report submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for Course GL456, Department of Geology, University of Leicester.

2. PLANNING YOUR WORK

Mind maps and concept maps

- Issues to consider in order to respond the question correctly



Planning



- Group together points that are related
- What should be included?
- Information that is not directly relevant to the report should not be included
- Keep referring to the report brief
- Consider what conclusions can be drawn
- Consider how you will order your material

3. COLLECTING YOUR INFORMATION

Resources: What?

- Literature
 - Books
 - Scholarly articles
- Law, legal cases
- Newspaper articles
- Data bases
- Empirical work
 - Interviews
 - Observation
 - Experiments
 - Surveys



Resources: How and Where?

- Library search
- Internet search
- Google Scholar
- British Library
- SCONUL (other libraries)
- LexisNexis, Westlaw (law)

The screenshot shows the University of Westminster Library Search interface. At the top, there are tabs for 'Books, journals & more' and 'Articles & more'. Below these are two search boxes: one for 'in the title' containing 'research methods' and another for 'Any' also containing 'research methods'. A 'Search' button is at the bottom left, and a 'Simple Search' link is to its right. On the left side, there are filters for 'Show only' (Physical Items 375, Full Text Online 76) and 'Refine My Results' (Resource Type: Books 422, Journals 15, Articles 1). On the right, it shows 'Results 1 - 10 of 446' for 'Book, journals & more'. It lists a result for 'Patrick McNeill Steve Chapman 1957-' with a note 'We have multiple versions of this title'. Below this is a Google Scholar search for 'research methods', showing about 6,620,000 results.



Scholar

About 6,620,000 results (0.04 sec)

Articles

Case law

My library New!

Any time

Since 2013

Since 2012

Since 2009

Custom range...

[\[book\] Qualitative research in education. An introduction](#)
RC Bogdan, SK Biklen - 1998 - ERIC

Abstract: This introductory level text provides a background for understanding qualitative research in education, its theoretical and historical underpinnings, and methods of educational research. This revised edition places qualitative research in a broader context by examining its relationship to other paradigms of educational inquiry.

Cited by 15097 Related articles All 5 versions Cite Save More

[\[book\] Qualitative evaluation and research methods.](#)
MQ Patton - 1990 - psycnet.apa.org

Abstract: 1. When one examines and judges accomplishments and engaged in evaluation. When this examination of effectiveness is conducted empirically through careful data collection and thoughtful analysis.

Cited by 30980 Related articles All 11 versions Cite Save More

Research and planning

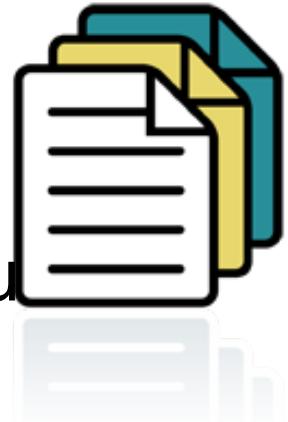
- **Relate what you read directly to the essay title/LOs**
 - Which parts are relevant? In what way?
 - What do they tell me?
 - How will it help me to answer the question?
- **Evaluate the source itself**, e.g.
 - Is the argument consistent?
 - Is the evidence convincing?
- **Compare sources**, e.g.
 - Does one support or disagree with another?
 - Does it raise a different issue?



Referencing

Why referencing:

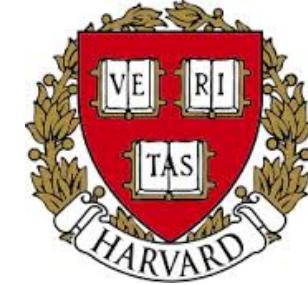
- provide evidence of your own research
- acknowledge that the work/idea belongs to another person
- illustrate a particular point
- support an argument or theory
- allow others to locate the resources you used
- avoid accusations of plagiarism
- Source: Information Systems and Library Services referencing your work



<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/study/current-students/support-and-facilities/library-it-services/referencing>

References and Bibliography

- “References”
 - Where a source is referred to **in the text** – give brief details within main body of your assignment
 - “Bibliography>List of references”
 - Full details listed in **A to Z order** of all of the sources used in your assignment
 - At the end of your assignment



Referencing style

- Harvard or Chicago?
 - Harvard: bracket references, e.g. (Niada 2013: p. 55)
 - Chicago: footnote references¹
- Follow what the course handbook requires and/or
- Follow what the library guide says
- Get a guide
- Be CONSISTENT, whichever style you choose – this is the most important thing



4. ORGANISING AND STRUCTURING INFORMATION

Report layout

- Reports are written in sections with headings and sub-headings, which are usually numbered
- Consult your module handbook to see if your report needs to have a specific structure
- Below are the possible components of a report, in the order in which they would appear

1. Title Page

2. Terms of Reference

- A brief explanation of who will read the report (audience), why and how it was written

3. (Executive) Summary

- Briefly describe the content of the report including an outline of the aims and main points to provide the reader with an overview

4. Table of Contents

- Presented so that the reader can quickly scan through what the report will entail. Use numbers, headings and subheadings to make it clear

5. Introduction

- The aims and objectives of the report include some background information and a description of research methods

6. Methods

- A list of any equipment used with explanations. Include sources of materials and preparation. Highlight any problems that occurred and why method(s) were changed.

7. Results

- A summary of results of the investigation or experiment. Include diagrams and charts to support results

8. Main Body

- Discuss results and draw on main points in more depth so that it follows in a logical order. Use headings, subheading and bullet points. Remember to reference using in-text citations.

Recommendations

9. Conclusion

- A summary of the main points. Highlight what you considered a central part of your report. Do not add anything new in this section.

10. Appendices

- Include all supporting information e.g. graphs, tables, questionnaires, transcripts

11. Bibliography

- Full list of sources used in alphabetical order e.g books, ebooks, websites, academic journals

12. Acknowledgments

- Acknowledge the assistance of an individual or organisation who provided you with advice

13. Glossary of Terms

- List of any technical terms with a brief description e.g. abbreviations or acronyms

Contents

● Introduction	1
● Acknowledgements	5
● Glossary	6
● Section 1: The training programme	
About the training programme	10
a. Objectives	
b. Workshop summaries	
c. Introduction to Section 2	
● Section 2: Key points and lessons learnt from the workshops	
Chapter 1 Introduction to climate change and carbon sequestration	15
a. The need for action	
b. Projected Impacts of climate change in Africa	
c. Climate change mitigation and adaptation - the role of forests	
Chapter 2 Introduction to REDD+	18
a. The road to REDD+	
b. What makes REDD+ different?	
c. Current status of REDD+ in Africa	
Chapter 3 REDD+ projects: organisational commitments	23
a. Validation and verification	
b. Key phases of REDD+ project development	
c. Organisational commitment – time and costs	
Chapter 4 REDD+ common risks and barriers	
a. Common risks and barriers to overcome	
Chapter 5 Guidelines for completing a bio-carbon feasibility study	
a. What is the difference between a Feasibility Study, PIN and PIF?	
b. Feasibility Study template with guidance notes	
Chapter 6 'Softer' alternatives to REDD+	
a. Conventional conservation with climate benefits	
b. REDD+ partnerships	
c. Payments for ecosystem services	
Chapter 7 Tools and Resources	
a. Resources used in training programme	
b. Additional suggestions	
c. Recommendations for keeping updated on REDD+(+)	
● Annexes	
Annex 1: About the trainers	
Annex 2: Lessons learnt: development and logistics of the training programme	
Annex 3: Workshop 1 attendees and running order	
Table 1: Staff and participants with contact information	
Annex 4: Workshop 2 attendees and running order	
Table 2: Staff and participants with contact information	
● Disclaimer and credits	
Disclaimer	
Credits	

How to create an outline

- Go to View
- Select Outline
- Select the text and choose what it should be:
 - If heading → level 1
 - If sub-heading → level 2
 - If sub-sub-heading → level 3
 - If body text → body text

How to insert a table of contents

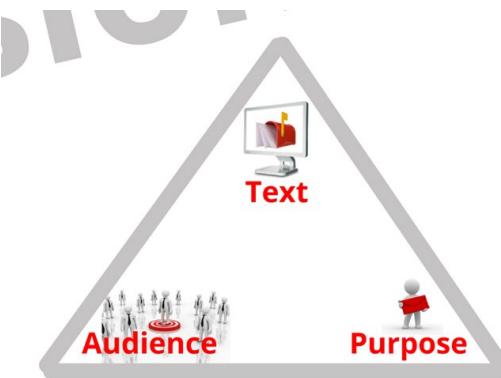
- Click an empty paragraph where you want to insert the TOC
- Go to References
- Go to Table of Contents
- Choose an automatic table
- Remember to update the table regularly to make sure it reflects headings name and page numbers
- To update the table:
 - Right click on the table
 - Update field
 - Choose: update entire table

5. WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT

The main text

Like other types of good workplace writing a report will have:

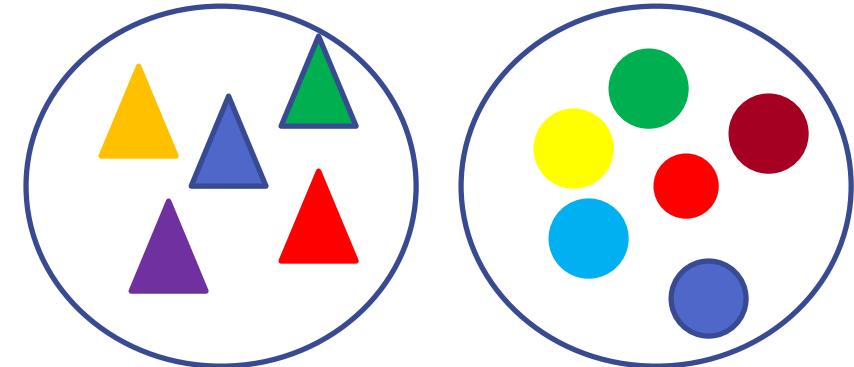
- Clear purpose
- Logical structure
- Interesting research (if applicable)
- Professional, simple and correct language
- Attention to the audience



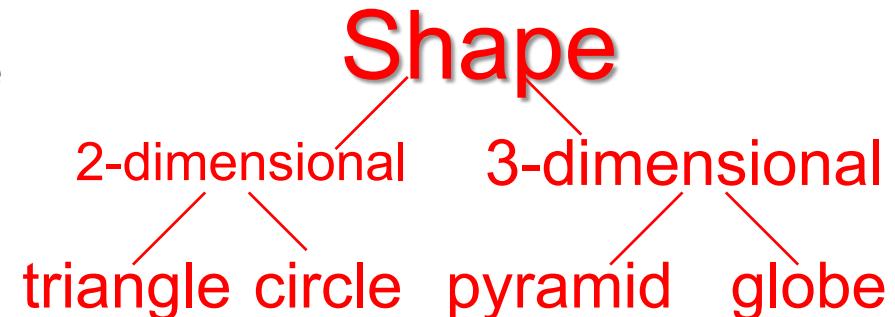
Category & hierarchy

These are useful organising tools:

Category – points that can be grouped together because they are related or connected in some way



Hierarchy – moves from the most general to more and more specific.
You can use this idea to structure your content



Example of a strong paragraph

Essay title:

What strategies do you consider to be useful in producing a good essay assignment?

Topic sentence:
(main point)

Another important step in producing a good assignment is to draft and then revise the essay several times. As Murray (2006) points out, although many students expect to produce a good version of their essay the first time they write it, most successful writers go through several revisions. This approach makes sense because writing an assignment is a complex process which involves many different aspects such as organisation, clear argument, flow, grammar and choice of words. It is not possible to focus on all these aspects simultaneously as we are writing. Therefore, an effective strategy is to produce a rough draft from the essay plan and then revise it two or three times, focussing on different aspects at each revision.

Development:

Conclusion / tie-back

6. CHECKING AND RE-DRAFTING

Revision



Helpful
Tips

- Carefully check the following elements of your report before you print off the final version:
 - General layout
 - Text organisation
 - Coherence
 - Grammar, spelling and punctuation
 - Referencing
 - Style

Exercise

- Evaluate the executive summaries provided

Useful resources

- University of Leeds, “Difference between an essay and a report” at
http://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/341/writing_skills/187/report_writing/4
- Birmingham City University, “Study Guides: Writing”, at
<http://library.bcu.ac.uk/learner/writingguides/1.27.htm>
- University of Leicester, “Writing reports”, at
<http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/lid/resources/writing/writing-resources/reports>

Academic Learning Development

- **Appointments** with a learning adviser
- **Skills workshops** and other activities

Bookings:



Link to main portal:

<https://engage.westminster.ac.uk/students/login>

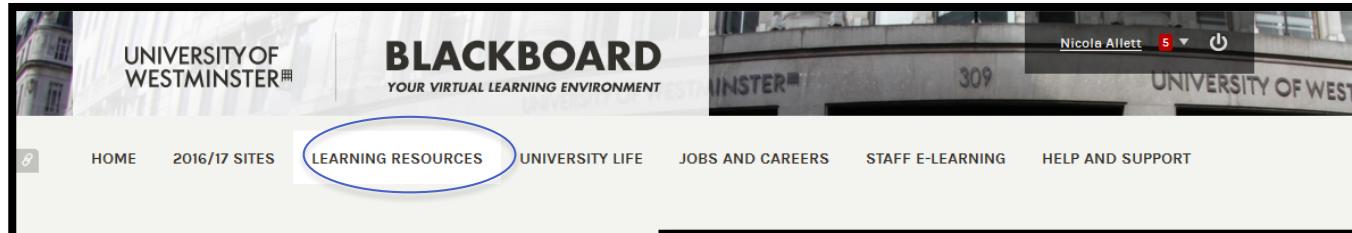
Direct link to our service:

<https://engage.westminster.ac.uk/workgroups/academic-writing-and-study-skills-support>

Academic Learning Development

Skills Resources

- You can find workshop slides, help-sheets and useful materials on our 'Skills Resources' Blackboard page.



The screenshot shows the University of Westminster Blackboard homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for HOME, 2016/17 SITES, LEARNING RESOURCES (which is circled in blue), UNIVERSITY LIFE, JOBS AND CAREERS, STAFF E-LEARNING, and HELP AND SUPPORT. Below the navigation, there's a banner featuring a building and the text '309 UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER'. On the left side of the main content area, there's a sidebar with a 'Training and Study Skills' section containing links for Skills Resources (circled in red), Academic Learning Development, Study Skills Workshops, IT Training, Academic English, Learn from your peers (WINPAL), and Disability Learning Support. Below this is a 'Did you know?' section with links for Level 4 Students, postgraduate courses, and Submitting Coursework Online. The main content area is titled 'Skills Resources' and contains sections for Learning Support Services (with a welcome message and a list of services: Academic Learning Development, IT Training, and Disability Learning Support), Academic Learning Development (with a sub-section for Prepare for your university assessments and exams, listing Academic Learning Development offers like skills workshops, appointments with a Learning Adviser, and academic skills resources, along with contact information: website, email, and a link to a workshop/appointment booking page), and a graphic of a head filled with colorful gears.



University of Westminster Learning Support

University of Westminster Learnin... Joined Share Notifications ...

Discussion Members Events Photos Files Search this group

[Write Post](#) [Add Photo / Video](#) [Create Poll](#) [More](#)

Write something...

PINNED POST

 **Laura Niada**
7 mins

WELCOME TO THE FACEBOOK PAGE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER LEARNING SUPPORT CENTRE!

*Please note that only University of Westminster students and staff can join this group *

The Learning Support Centre comprises: ... See More



ADD MEMBERS
+ Enter name or email address...

MEMBERS 1,874 Members (27 new)


DESCRIPTION [Edit](#)
WELCOME TO THE FACEBOOK PAGE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER LE... See More

GROUP TYPE
School or Class

TAGS [Edit](#)
Study skills

CREATE NEW GROUPS
Groups make it easier than ever to share with friends, family and teammates. [Create Group](#)

RECENT GROUP PHOTOS [See All](#)



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TWEETS 152 FOLLOWING 105 FOLLOWERS 184 LIKES 1

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University of Westminster Learning Support. Empowering students to reach their learning potential. We support all students with their academic skills.

📍 University of Westminster
🔗 westminster.ac.uk/study/current-students/
📅 Joined May 2014

72 Photos and videos

Tweets **Tweets & replies** **Media**

UW Learning Support @UWstudyskills · Aug 30
We are now booking with engage: engage.westminster.ac.uk/workgroups/aca... #getengaged



UW Learning Support @UWstudyskills · Aug 21
Great tips on learning (and writing) English here: learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/

UW Learning Support @UWstudyskills · Aug 15
New international students - website with lots of useful learning resources about studying in UK: prepareforsuccess.org.uk