Report Writing

Reports are systematic, well-organized documents used to communicate information, which has been compiled as a result of research and analysis of data and of issues. Reports can cover a wide range of topics, but usually focus on transmitting information with a clear purpose, to a specific audience.

Therefore, a report is a presentation of facts and findings aimed at forming an opinion or recommendation. We can also describe a report as a prepared account of what happened, about a particular event and so is a document explaining an occurrence.

Reports are often structured in a way that reflects the information finding process and the writing up of the findings: that is, in a summary of the contents, introduction or background, methods, results, discussion, conclusion and/or recommendations. The inclusion of recommendations is one reason why reports are a common form of writing in every profession and academics, since the informed recommendations are useful for decision-making. A report may be a single report or a series of them depending on what is being reported and the duration of the occurrence.

What is a good report?

- Good reports are documents that are accurate, objective and complete. They should also be well written, clearly structured and expressed in a way that holds the reader's attention and meets their expectations. The true value of the research may be judged through a report since. Thus, the quality and worth of work can be judged by the quality of the written report. Its clarity, organization and content" (Blake & Bly, 1993: 119).

In summary, a good report:
- Must meet the needs of the readers and answer the questions in their minds
- Must be at the right level for the readers. Some readers have an in-depth knowledge of the subject while others may be decision-makers without specialized, technical knowledge
- Must have a clear, logical structure-with clear signposting to show where the ideas are leading
- Must give a good first impression and be presented well in an orderly and chronological manner
- Must not make assumptions about the readers' understanding
- Must be grammatical and concise having a time reference

Scope and structure

The scope and style of reports vary depending on three key factors:

- The report's intended audience

- The report's purpose and

- The type of information to be communicated

For example, technical reports communicate technical information, so the degree of technicality in the report will depend on the reader's familiarity and understanding of technical concepts. All reports are presented in formal and organized format backed with statistical evidence where necessary.

Functions of Reports

- Judging performance

- Informing change

- Fact finding

- Pointing Causes of problems e.g., low margins, high rate of staff turnover, accidents in factory etc.

- Suggesting measures to overcome the business problems

- For improvement of operational or technical assignments, planning procedures, and solving problems

- Decision Making

Types of Reports

1. Academic Report. These are usually detailed and, in most cases, targeting academicians. They are of high content and the producer and the reader are at the same level or a little different.

2. Professional Report. Professional reports are for informing and persuading people as well as initiating change. They may be detailed depending on the targeted audience and taste of the sponsor. In most cases, they have a mixed audience made up of those who may understand the in-depth of the subject content and non-technical people like the decision-makers.

3. Formal Report. The formal report collects and interprets data and reports information. The formal report is complex and may even be produced in bound book volumes. It is often a written account of a major project. Examples of subject matter include new technologies, the advisability of launching a new project line, results of a study or experiment, analysis of relocation for corporate relocation, an annual report, or a year old review of developments in the field.

4. **Technical and Special Reports.** The technical report is a category, not by type. Many industries and disciplines need specialized reports. Within the insurance industry and in police work, there are needs for specialized accident or incident reports.

5. **Feasibility report.** The feasibility report defines a need or proposed idea, then analyses, compares and recommends a course of action. When your organization is considering a new

   location, expansion, or purchase of new equipment, for example, it's imperative that you look closely to see which course of action is best and if that course of action is likely to succeed.

Parts of a report

1. Title

The title page should also contain details, including:

- Full title of the report

- Name(s) of the author(s)

- Purpose for which the report is prepared

- Name of the institution for which the report is prepared

- Month and year of report

2. Executive summary

Executive summary is the summary of the whole report in a logical order. This should highlight the purpose, research methods, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. An executive summary should be written in the past tense and should not be longer than 1 page. Though this section is included in the first part of the report, it is easier to write this part, after completing the rest of the report.

3. Introduction

This is one of the most important paragraphs. An effective introduction introduces the topic and purpose of the report or essay and outlines your approach, i.e. the main ideas that will be developed within it. After reading just the introduction, the reader should be able to know (i) the purpose of the paper and (ii) the main ideas which will be covered within it.

4. Method/Methodology

This is the section where you explain the methods used in your research. If it is scientific research, you can describe the experimental procedures.

5. Results\Findings

This section presents the results or findings of your project/research. You can also present data using visual methods such as tables, graphs, etc. However, do not interpret the findings here.

6. Discussion

In this section, you can explain what the above results mean. You can also analyze, interpret and evaluate data, note trends, and compare results with theory. Generally, this is referred to as the most important part of the report.

7. Conclusions

This is a brief summary of findings. Conclusion should not be confused with Results/Findings section, as the conclusion is a simplification of the problem that can reasonably be deduced from the findings.

8. Recommendations

In recommendation section, suitable changes, solutions should be provided.

9. Appendices/ Annexes

These generally contain detailed information which is not essential in the main chapters of the report but which needs to be reproduced. Examples of material suitable for appendices include a copy of any questionnaire or interview outline used in the research, economic information, background information on companies used in case study, list of abbreviations used in the report, etc.

Steps to Follow when Writing a Report

1. Plan

Before putting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard!), it is important to plan how you will approach to the assignment of writing a report. Planning includes:

Define the purpose - Make sure you have carefully read and analyzed the assignment and have a clear idea of the exact purpose.

Gather information - Use a variety of sources in your fact-finding, and reference the sources accurately. When gathering information, take into account the following details:

- Authorship (who has written this material?)

- Bias (might the author be biased in any particular way)

- Currency (how up-to-date or relevant is this source?)

Remember to keep track of each source you use, so that you'll be able to correctly reference each of your sources in the final essay.

During the planning stage try to impose the tentative structure, your material will adopt. However, do not impose a structure too early; gather your ideas, assess them, then organize and evaluate them. Once this is done, you can identify the 3 to 5 main ideas around which to structure the report or essay. The overall structure of a report or essay should look something like this:

- Introduction - outlining your approach to the report or essay

- Body - 3 to 5 main points; 1 or 2 paragraphs for each main point

- Summary and/or conclusions - summarize/conclude your main message

- List of references - list all sources used in preparing the report or essay

2. Write

Many people unfortunately begin the report writing process at this stage. It becomes much easier to write a good paper after you have clarified the purpose, gathered the relevant information, assessed and evaluated the information, and planned the structure as explained in the planning stage above.

Writing must begin with a rough draft of each of the main sections first. After this, you can more easily write the introduction (outlining your approach) and the summary/conclusion (summarizing the key ideas of the report or essay).

3. Reference your Sources

Once your first draft is written, it's time to refine and revise, taking care to use a clear writing style. Finally, proof-read from start to finish; it is often useful to ask someone else to do this, as errors can
go unnoticed when you have worked on a piece of writing for some time.

4. Write the final draft of the report

The final draft must be written professionally, the same way as you would speak. Write the way you would speak in a formal professional business setting. Use the register of your profession. Do not use jargon. Avoid complex words, which you would not normally use in everyday speech and everyday life. The material should be capable of being understood by the average person. The language and tone should be professional/academic.

Avoid redundant words. These are flowery words. Words that do not add meaning. Eliminate redundant words from sentences, while at the same time retaining the full meaning of the sentence. Do not include words where their omission would make no difference to the meaning of the sentence.

Length and format

Maximum length, in terms of number of words, may be specified. There is however no relationship between quality and length of report. Nonetheless, there is a trend towards concise, brief reports.

Briefer reports are more likely to reflect sharp and clear thinking (Allen, 1973). Choice of font and spacing should be double spacing, in Times New Roman 12 font.

Using tables and figures

Tables are very powerful tools for summarizing material. If they are well structured, they can communicate a lot of information very parsimoniously. Figures, similarly, are powerful communication tools. Commentary should come before (not after) tables and figures. However, there are occasions where comments may follow rather than precede tables and figures.

When writing a report

1. Don't use no double negative or emotional words
2. Make each pronoun agree with their antecedent
3. Use connectors
4. Verbs must to agree with their subjects and case
5. Punctuate your report professionally
6. Correct spelling

Format for Report writing

1. Memos

A memo, short for memorandum, is a type of routine report an organization prepares for internal communication purposes. It is impersonal and objective in its tone, and its length ranges between a sentence or two to several pages. Most memos begin with background

information, including information on the sender, receiver, the date, subject and location in case the memo refers to an event. A memo is the most informal type of report format.

2. Letter Report

Letter reports are usually one-page documents used for external communication purposes. They are in block format and include standard features of letters, such as the sender's address, receiver's name

and address, date, salutation, body, acknowledgment and sender's signature. Letter reports normally are typed on a company letterhead.

3. Formal Reports

Formal reports follow a methodical structure and communicate knowledge, results and findings to a range of internal and external readers. Most formal reports contain a title page, cover letter, table of contents, list of tables and illustrations, executive summary, an extensive body and references. The title page lists the name of the report, date of completion and name of author or company. The cover letter summarizes the purpose of the report, its importance and any required follow-up action needed. The table of contents lists the major topics in the report along with their page numbers. The executive summary highlights the report's main points, the report body also may include conclusions and recommendations, and the references page notes the sources cited in the report.

4. Semi-Formal Reports

A semi-formal report, also called a titled document, is a shorter, less complex version of a formal report. Semi-formal reports typically have multiple pages including a title page, introduction page, a body and references.