

Computing Project

(COMP08053)

Lecture 9

How to Write a Project Report

Report writing

Being able to produce a clear, well structured and informed report is vital for any computing related project

Unfortunately many students lack this basic skills even at Honours level which often carries through to the workplace

This is one of the reasons why many employers complain about graduates lacking basic skills

Report writing

Reports vary in their purpose, but all will require a formal structure and careful planning...

...as well as presenting the material in a logical manner using clear and concise language

Report writing

Defining the purpose of your report – is your report primarily:

A Factual report – aimed at informing

An Instructional report – aimed at explaining

A Leading report – aimed at persuading

Or a combination of the above?

Report writing

A report is a document that defines a subject or problem

A report gathers **relevant information** and **facts** in order to present them as **completely** and **accurately** as possible

A report may include **analysis, judgement, conclusions** and **recommendations**

Report writing

A report therefore needs to be:

- Understandable
- Precise
- Logically structured
- Descriptive
- Aimed at the reader

Reports are particularly useful for **informing, explaining and persuading**

Before writing the report

Important to consider **who** you are writing the report for and **why**

Key questions to ask yourself:

- Who wants the report?
- Why do they want it?
- What are they going to do with it?
- What do they want it to cover?
- What will the report not cover?
- What will happen as a result of the report?

Report writing

A report should have a clear objective, i.e. what you are trying to achieve

A clear objective = a clear focus = easier to write

Planning

Important to start off by brainstorming what you have been asked to do

- Write down the purpose of the report in the middle of a piece of A4 paper
- Write down the key ideas/phrases that link to the purpose of the report
- Group pieces of information under the key areas connecting them by links

Planning

- Review the plan, adding or deleting points where necessary
- Look for a simple structure, and order the key ideas
- You could structure the report around the coursework marking scheme or agreed marking scheme with your tutor
- This will make up key sections of your report

Research

- **Check existing knowledge**, i.e. what you know already, and what you need to find out
- Record the **research methods** used
- Record the **sources** used
- **Make notes** from the sources – reference sources as you go along

Research

- **Order** your notes and **group together** points based on the original plan
- **Check** that you have done what the task requires

Report writing – the structure

Title page:

Highlights central theme of report, includes title, author(s) name, date, organisation

Acknowledgements (optional):

Acknowledge any help you may have received in collecting information for the report, any organisations who might have participated in the investigation

Report writing – the structure

Contents:

Lists main sections and sub-sections in sequence together with page number. A list of illustrations and appendices should be detailed

Summary (Executive Summary):

Provides reader with brief outline of report

Report writing – the structure

Introduction:

Sets scene and should include:

- Why report was written/background
- Terms of reference – determines scope of report (objective, purpose, and use)
- Method of investigation
- Resources available
- Sources used
- Limitations
- Structure of the report

Report writing – the structure

Main text:

Main substance of the report detailing areas that might include - key findings, data found, design, development, what you have found out, opinions, evaluation conclusions or recommendations

Present your findings in as simple a way as possible, e.g.

- Tables
- Graphs
- Pie charts / Bar charts
- Diagrams

Report writing – the structure

Conclusion:

Should link with what you were trying to do with findings, draws together main points of report

No new data should arise here

Report writing – the structure

Recommendations:

Should follow logically from conclusion and be specific, measurable and achievable

Should propose how situation/problem can be improved by stating action to be taken

Ideally recommendations should be numbered

Report writing – the structure

Appendices : Supplementary information

Will the reader need to know this?

Yes

Do they need to know it to follow the argument?

Yes

Put in the main body

No

Don't include in report

No

Is it referred to several times?

Yes

Put in main body

No

Put in appendix

Report writing – the structure

References:

List of bibliographic details of all materials mentioned in text

Suggested use Harvard method of referencing (see handout)

Glossary:

Useful if report uses a lot of technical vocabulary or acronyms to give definitions

Report writing – the structure

Style and Structure

Match the **style** to the reader. Key is to keep the report clear and concise

Avoid jargon and use Plain English when possible

Sentences – keep them short – no longer than 25 words

Report writing – the structure

Style and Structure

Paragraphs:

Concentrate on one theme, paragraphs should be connected with link words

Avoid paragraphs that are too short (1 or 2 sentences) or too long more than half a page

Report writing – the structure

Style and Structure

Tense:

Reports are normally written in the past tense and the third person, i.e.

It is recommended that

Use 'I' if appropriate

I or we recommend that ...

Report writing – the structure

Style and Structure

Notation:

Identify the main components of the report

1.Heading

1.2 Subheading

1.2.1 Avoid numbering further than this

Include page numbers

Report writing – the structure

Style and Structure

Illustrations:

Only include in main body of report if fundamental to text, or if referred to several times

Otherwise place them in an appendix

Report writing – the structure

Illustrations checklist:

- Are all your diagrams / illustrations clearly labelled?
- Do they have titles?
- Is the link between the text and the diagram clear?
- Are the headings precise?
- Are the axis of graphs clearly labelled?
- Are the diagrams / illustrations legible?

Report writing – the structure

References:

Details should include:

- Author's name and initials
- Date of publication
- Title of book, paper or journal
- Publisher
- Place of publication
- Page numbers
- Details of volume of journal
- If web resource – URL and date accessed

Report writing – After writing

Check your report for:

- Completeness
- Accuracy
- Layout
- Spelling
- Numbering
- Illustrations

Report writing – After writing

Your report may require several revisions before you get to the final version

Rushed reports and report produced at the last minute are not usually of the best quality and highest standard

There are usually 'tell tale' signs that show a report has been produced quickly with little time and effort spent

Report writing – After writing

*****Very Important*****

Check against the coursework marking scheme or marking scheme agreed with your tutor to ensure you have not overlooked anything

Don't throw away marks by forgetting to include important sections