

Report Writing: Good and Bad Reports

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PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- ❑ What makes a good report
- ❑ What makes a bad report
- ❑ Examples of good and bad reports
- ❑ How to succeed with your report



PURPOSE OF REPORT WRITING

☐ **Why write reports?**

- ☐ Demonstrate and reinforce knowledge of a topic
- ☐ Important set of skills required for employment

☐ **What is a report?**

- ☐ Written for a clear purpose and a certain audience
- ☐ Specific information and evidence are presented, analysed and applied to a particular problem or issue
- ☐ Information is presented in a clearly structured format
- ☐ Use of sections and headings to ensure the information is easy to locate and follow



WHAT MAKES A GOOD REPORT?



- ☐ **What is an effective report:**
- ☐ Evidence of having understood the purpose of the report
- ☐ Evidence of having gathered, evaluated and analysed relevant information
- ☐ Structure material in a logical and coherent order
- ☐ Present report in a coherent manner
- ☐ Make appropriate conclusions supported by evidence and analysis of the report
- ☐ Make thoughtful and practical recommendations where required

WHAT MAKES A BAD REPORT?

☐ What characteristics make a bad report:

- ☐ Badly structured
- ☐ Inappropriate writing style
- ☐ Incorrect or inadequate referencing
- ☐ Does not answer or address the topic
- ☐ Too much/too little/irrelevant material
- ☐ Expression not clear
- ☐ Does not relate results to purpose
- ☐ Unnecessary use of jargon



WHY WRITE A TECHNICAL REPORT? (1)

- ☐ In industry technical reports are used to communicate technical information
- ☐ Information in technical reports assist in decision making (e.g. purchase of equipment; finding solutions to technical problems)
- ☐ Important to consider the audience and purpose of the report:
 - ☐ Brief managers
 - ☐ Provide technical background information for lay people associated with the project
 - ☐ Make recommendations to technical supervisors

WHY WRITE A TECHNICAL REPORT? (2)

- ☐ In Higher Education technical report writing is a regularly used assignment format (e.g. engineering, IT, applied sciences)
- ☐ Students sometimes required to bring theory and real world situations together
- ☐ Present and convey information in a structured and presentable format
- ☐ Present information for a specific audience
- ☐ Engineering students might be asked to solve a design problem
- ☐ IT students might be asked to develop an information management plan for a specific issue or company
- ☐ Evaluate recent developments in a certain industry
- ☐ Learning how to report on technical information to others is an important component of technical studies

TYPICAL STRUCTURE OF A REPORT

☐ Typical structure of a technical report:

- ☐ Title Page
- ☐ Abstract (Executive Summary)
- ☐ Table of Contents
- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ Main Body
- ☐ Analysis
- ☐ Conclusion
- ☐ Reference List
- ☐ Appendix



TITLE AND CONTENTS PAGES

- ❑ Title pages and content pages allow readers to know who is responsible for the document and allow them to find information easily
- ❑ Useful for long reports such as projects or dissertations
- ❑ Title page clearly shows your name, your report title, date the report was completed
- ❑ Contents page is an outline of the structure of your report illustrating the headings of each section and the pages they start on

ABSTRACT OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ❑ Concise summary of your whole report
- ❑ Assists readers decide whether they want to read the whole report – acts as ‘shop window’
- ❑ Abstract is sometimes the only part of the report that people read
- ❑ Abstracts are most commonly found in research reports
- ❑ Provide an overview of the key aims, methods, findings and conclusions
- ❑ Summarises the whole report (200 words or fewer; normally written as one paragraph)
- ❑ Executive summary is more often found in business reports

INTRODUCTION

- ❑ There are two main purposes to an introduction:
 - 1) Introduces the context of your report – explains what you have been asked to investigate
 - 2) Analyses the background literature that relates to your investigation (previous research and work in the area)
- ❑ Introductions also do the following:
 - ❑ Provide a description main aims, objectives and scope of the report
 - ❑ State an overview of the report's sections and their relationship to your investigation
 - ❑ Explain terminology (if required)
 - ❑ Indicate methods of report
 - ❑ Mention the limitations of the study
 - ❑ Outline material presented in the rest of the report

MAIN BODY OF REPORT

- ❑ Usually the longest part of the report
- ❑ Expands and develops material in a logical a coherent manner
- ❑ Reflects the structure outlined in the introduction
- ❑ Contains a description of the findings and a discussion of them
- ❑ Must be presented logically to ensure it is easy to read
- ❑ Use of headings to organise the information in the report and make it logical
- ❑ Sometimes includes discussion or analysis section though this can be added as a separate section

ANALYSIS

- ❑ Provides a discussion of the literature presented in the report
- ❑ Weighs up the findings from identified studies
- ❑ Compares and contrasts the evidence
- ❑ Reviews what has been addressed in the report so far
- ❑ Assists to inform the conclusions and recommendations

CONCLUSION

- ☐ Summarises the major inferences that can be drawn by the information presented in the report
- ☐ Answers questions raised by the original research problem or purpose of the report
- ☐ States conclusions reached
- ☐ Illustrates 'what it all means'
- ☐ Significance of the findings and their impact
- ☐ Lets readers know why your findings are important
- ☐ Conclusions must be formed from the evidence discussed in the main body of the report
- ☐ Includes suggestions for further research
- ☐ 'take-away' message for readers

REFERENCE LIST

- ❑ List of all the references cited in the text of your report
- ❑ Listed in alphabetical order at the end of the report
- ❑ Good idea to compile your reference list as you write your report so you can keep track of all your sources



APPENDIX

- ☐ Presented last in your report
- ☐ Contain additional information that is useful for your reader
- ☐ Information that supports your analysis and conclusions (e.g. figures, tables, graphs, charts, statistics, questionnaires, drawings, pictures)
- ☐ Each item in the appendices requires to have been selected and have a purpose – not viewed as a ‘dumping ground’
- ☐ No limit to what is placed in the appendix as long as it is relevant and reference is made to it in the report
- ☐ Information in the appendix must relate directly to the purpose of the report
- ☐ Each separate appendix should be lettered: Appendix A, Appendix B, Appendix B1, Appendix B2, Appendix C.....