

Planning to write a report

Before writing a report, you should consider the following:

Establishing the Purpose

- It is always written with the intention of achieving some objective.
- It can be based on practical work, a review of literature or an industrial or business situation that you have studied.
- You have to identify the objective or topic and what you have to report on. This forms the focus for how you gather the information.

Audience/Reader

- It is always written for a "client", who can be within the organisation, eg. your supervisor, or outside the organisation. It can even be a group of customers.
- It is therefore necessary to identify who will be reading the report and what they want from it (that is, the needs of the readers).
- This awareness of your audience determines how much background information needs to be given in the report.
- In your report you therefore need to bridge this gap between the readers' background knowledge and their needs.
- Awareness of the readers helps you determine the choice of vocabulary, the degree of detail, the tone of the report, and the emphasis.
- If you are trying to convey technical information to a non-technical reader, special attention to use of words and detail is necessary.

Investigating Past Knowledge

This may involve a literature review and interviews with key people. We recommend that you:

- Prepare your reading list, making sure you find out if you need to get information from sources other than books and articles.
- Collect your information.
- Consider interviewing or talking to people who are involved. (Avoid "hearsay") You can also check computer print-outs, collect brochures and pamphlets.

Obtaining New Evidence

You may need to do some of the following:

- Carry out experiments.
- Collect data.
- Visit a site.
- Carry out calculations.
- Carry out a design.
- Conduct interviews.

Available online at <http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/quickrefs/>

Making Conclusions and Recommendations

- Having done these activities, you should be thinking about making conclusions and/or recommendations.
- You must consider what will be most important for the readers.

Writing the report:

Organising the Information

In writing a report, you should state clearly at the beginning what the report is about. The report should be organised to communicate clearly the main idea first, and then provide the supporting details.

The information should be presented in a logical order. In describing a mechanism, this could mean moving from the general (function and formation of the machine) to the particular (the details of the construction).

The report should state the conclusions clearly and, where appropriate, give the reader information to help him/her make decisions.

Establishing the Tone/Style

- A report should be based on information which is presented as objectively as possible. You should not let bias or preconceptions cloud your judgement.
- If you are stating an opinion, make this clear. For example, you could write "In my opinion ..."
- A good report will analyse and evaluate as well as merely describe. The ability to respond to these academic requirements separates the good or excellent report from the average.
- A report is a reflection of you as a professional. Good reports reflect favourably on the author. Strive for quality, precision and accuracy.

Writing the Report

- Finalise the sections into their logical order.
- Draft the report, writing key ideas from your plan into sentences.
- Rework your data to present it forcibly and clearly.
- Make sure your discussion flows logically from the evidence.
- Write the final copy, eliminating any repetition and recasting any sentences/sections where meaning is unclear.
- Read what you have written, preferably aloud. If anything is unclear to you it will be unclear to the reader.

Other useful references

Craswell, G 2005, *Writing for Academic Success*, Sage, London, UK, pp.140-154.

Kimberly, N & Crosling, G 2005, *Q Manual*, Monash University, Caulfield East, Vic, pp.38-45.

Report writing tutorial, L&L Online <http://www.monash.edu.au/lsl/online/writing/general/report/index.xml>

Marketing report tutorial, L & L Online <http://www.monash.edu.au/lsl/online/writing/business-economics/marketing/index.xml>