Professional Report Writing

IMSD

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Agenda

1. What is a report?
2. Why write reports?
3. What makes a “good” report?
4. How do we produce a good report?
5. The essentials of professional report writing
6. Other considerations
7. Addressing specific audiences
What is a report?

A written document describing the findings of an individual or group

(Web definition)

A statement of the results of an investigation or of any matter on which definite information is required.

(Oxford English Dictionary)
Why write reports?

To:
- Develop an argument
- Re-affirm ideas and concepts
- Clarify what we have observed, read and understood
- Assess progress
- Deepen learning
- Strengthen self-expression and communication
What makes a “good” report?

A good report:
- Answers the question in the title
- Draws on relevant reading for its main content
- Shows a good grasp of the ideas studied in the course
- Presents a coherent argument
- Is written in an objective analytical style with appropriate use of evidence
- Is concise and easy to read
How do we produce a good report?

PLANNING is key!

- Think about the essay title
- Gather material
- Note ideas on paper
- Organise material
- Write a first draft
- Review the draft
- Write a final draft
The essentials of professional report writing

The essentials of a good report

- Structure
- Content
- Style
Structure

- Title page
- Acknowledgements
- Contents
- Abstract or summary
- Introduction
- Methodology
- Results or findings
- Discussion
- Conclusion and recommendations
- References
- Appendices

Content

Introduction
Terms of reference
Limits of report
Outline of method used
Brief background to subject matter

Methodology
The form of your enquiry
The way you collected data

Discussion
Identification of key issues
Possible explanations for your findings
Problems encountered
Balanced view
Content

Conclusions and recommendations
Drawing together of main ideas
No new information
Clear and concise recommendations

References
Complete and accurate list of references

Appendices
Supporting information

Style

Writing style
Use clear and concise language
Don’t use jargon or slang
Keep sentences short
Keep paragraphs focussed
Use active or passive voice –not both
Check your grammar and spelling!

Presentation
Type your work with clear font and spacing
Leave a good margin
Label each section carefully and consistently
Make sure headings are clear
Number all the pages!
Other considerations

Length

- Stick to what is requested! (e.g. 3000 words)
- Put extra data in appendices
- Do not exceed or shorten total word length by more or less than 10%
Tables and diagrams

• Place in text at relevant point
• Keep them simple
• Acknowledge sources
• Clearly label figure in text

Appendices

• Additional information or material referred to in the main report if relevant!
• Appendices should be placed after references/bibliography and listed in contents page
• Appendices are not included in word count but should not be more than 20% of total word length
Quotations

• Short quotations can be placed in text using single inverted commas and a statement such as Smith argues ‘quote’
• Long quotations should be placed in a separate paragraph in italics
• All quotations should be followed by a reference in brackets directing the reader to the bibliography at the end of the report e.g. ‘Quote...’ (Smith, 2001, p.75)

References

• Standard method of acknowledging use of other authors’ materials
• Used for direct quotes or summarising views
• Necessary to avoid plagiarism
• Include a bibliography (or list of references) at end of report
• The Harvard method is recommended for quotations and the bibliography.
• The bibliography is not included in the total word count
Plagiarism

The substantial or verbatim quotation of work by an unacknowledged author that is consciously presented as the participant’s own work.

The large-scale lifting/copying of other people’s work from texts, papers, dissertations or other material is a disciplinary offence.

Don’t make assertions without reasoned arguments and corroborative evidence!

Reference your sources.

Be:
• Objective - be logical, reasoned and neutral
• Precise -take care in your choice of words
• Balanced -use evidence in support of arguments
Addressing specific audiences

- Who are your readers?
- Background? Knowledge? Experience? Education/Training?
- Needs and interests?
- What, if anything, sets them apart from other people?
- How familiar are they with your subject?
- Is there more than one audience?