



Report Writing

What is a Report

A report is a factual account of information required by professionals to make decisions. An academic report is generally a schematic formal report that requires students to investigate and present their findings and recommendations in a logical and well-structured way. The material selected for your report will vary according to the discipline or subject area as well as in its purpose. Reports usually consist of the following parts and often use numbered headings.

Typical structure of a report

Title Page: A short and precise statement about the topic.

Abstract or Executive Summary: A summary of the problem or question, the research methods, the findings and their implications (about 150-200 words).

Table of Contents: A detailed list of sections covered in the report with corresponding page numbers.

Introduction: A brief background of the topic, the scope of the report and the aim/purpose of the investigation.

Method: A step-by-step description of the procedure used to carry out the investigation, the tools used to collect the information and the participants (if any).

Findings: A section with logical headings and subheadings that outlines the key issues, facts and evidence-based statements.

Conclusion: An outline of interpretations and judgements made after analysing the findings. State the implications or significance of your findings. Discuss whether the aim of the report has been successful or not and the limitations of the study.

Recommendations: A list of suggestions for solving the problem or a recommended course of action.

References: A list of all the printed and online sources used in the report.

Appendices: Attachments of any relevant and/or interesting information which may include any graphs, charts, tables or other data, referred to in the report but not included in the body, usually because of the need to keep a report as uncomplicated as possible.

Top Tips

- Analyse the question and marking criteria carefully
- Pay special attention to the *Introduction*
- Write the *Abstract or Executive Summary* last
- Learn the key differences between an essay and a report
- Pay special attention to formatting
- Follow the formatting style of your subject area
- Ask lecturers about numbering – modern style is for minimal numbering
- Use clear and concise captions for tables and graphs
- Write concisely – use bullet points where appropriate
- Aim for a formal, objective tone



Some essential differences between a report and an essay:

A Report	An Essay
Presents information	Presents an argument
Can be scanned quickly	Can be read slowly and carefully
Uses numbered headings and sub-headings	Uses minimal sub-headings, if any
May not need references and Bibliography/ Reference List	Must have Citations and a Bibliography/Reference List
Uses short, concise paragraphs and bullet points where appropriate	Links ideas into cohesive paragraphs, rather than breaking them down into bullet points
Uses graphics wherever possible (tables, graphs, illustrations)	Rarely uses graphics
May need an abstract (sometimes called an executive summary)	Will only need an abstract if it is very long, or if the lecturer asks for one specifically
May be followed by recommendations and/or appendices	Seldom has recommendations or appendices

With acknowledgements to University of Canberra <http://www.canberra.edu.au/studyskills/writing/reports>