

STUDENT NOTES FOR SUCCESS

No 6

Report Writing: Structure and Content

The key words for success in report writing are: organisation, clarity, precision and logic. Having a clear report structure makes writing a report much easier.

What is a report?

A report is a structured document that is requested or commissioned by a person (e.g. your boss), a company (e.g. the Moreton Development Company), or a body or department (e.g. the Tennis Association of WA). The person or body commissioning the report will generally require you to provide information with recommendations to address a problem or issue that has been identified.



Report Writing Structure

Reports are usually structured through the use of numbered headings and sub-headings. Most reports have some or all of the following elements:

- Title/cover page
- Table of Contents
- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Main Body of Report (Discussion)
- Recommendations
- Conclusion
- Reference List or Bibliography
- Appendix/ Appendices

Title/Cover Page

This usually contains: the title of the report, the name of the person/company/body who commissioned it, the name of the author/s and a date (usually month and year in which the report is completed).

Contents Page

The contents page shows the main sections of the report, listing all headings and sub-headings (using a decimal numbering system) and showing page numbers.

Executive Summary

The executive summary provides an overview of the entire report. It should be a clear, succinct summary covering all matters of key importance to the report. These include:

- who authorised the report
- objectives of the report
- scope (topic and limitations)
- information sources used
- findings
- key recommendations
- principal elements of conclusion.

Written last, the executive summary is placed at the front of a report. It allows the reader to quickly access the report's main points, recommendations or required actions.

Introduction

The introduction to a report provides similar information to that found in the Executive Summary but does so in much greater detail. A report introduction begins by documenting the following:

- who has authorised the report
- the topic being presented
- the purpose and objectives of the report
- the terms of reference or limitations
- information sources used
- general description of the report structure.



Main Body of Report (Discussion)

The main body of your report is used to build a discussion of the topic and develop your argument, position, opinion and recommendations. It is essential that you provide evidence in support of your discussion by referencing all sources that you have consulted to build your knowledge of the topic. You may have a number of sub-headings in this section.

Recommendations

Many reports provide recommendations or an 'action plan' based on the findings. These may be listed separately or as part of the ongoing discussion, but should stand out, in any case.



Example:

This report recommends that a membership drive be undertaken within the next six months.

Conclusion

A conclusion typically sums up the purpose of the report, how it was developed, what it found, and the major recommendations. The intention of a conclusion is to remind the reader of the overall report content and outcomes by providing a summarised explanation. This may result in some repetition of information, which should be clear and succinct.

Reference List/Bibliography

All sources of information used in compiling your report (written material, audio and video documents) must be listed in your reference list at the end of the report. People that you may have interviewed to obtain information may be listed separately or acknowledged under acknowledgements at the front of your report (but only if they wish to be identified!).

Appendix/Appendices

Many reports have one or more attached items such as diagrams or other documents. These are called appendix items. They provide 'extra' information on the topic, or evidence in support of the topic that does not need to be integrated into the body of the report.

A report may also require:

- a letter of transmittal – a covering letter addressed to the person/company who commissioned the report
- acknowledgements – thanking people who may have helped you carry out your research.



Hot tip

It is important to remember that this report writing structure is a basic outline and that each School within CBS and companies may have a variation on this report-writing style that must be followed. Check your assignment outline.

Find out more at the CBS Academic Communication Development website:

<https://businesslaw.curtin.edu.au/study/student-experience/academic-communication-development/>

You might also be interested in *Handy Handout 14. Planning and pre-writing.*

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