Tip Sheet Reports

Do you need to write a report but don’t know where to start?

This tip sheet describes what a report is and outlines the various elements of a report and how these are structured within different types of reports.

What is a report?

• A clearly structured document in which the writer identifies and examines issues, events, or findings of an investigation.
• Information obtained from research or from completing a project is delivered in a precise, concise writing style organised under a set of headings and sub-headings, which enable the reader to find data quickly.
• Graphs and tables can also be used to present data in the body of the report.
• Frequently provides recommendations for action based on the information it has presented.

What is the structure of a report?

• Structure varies between institutions, organisations, disciplines, units and even between lecturers.
• Generally organised into sections using clear headings.
• Below are some headings typically used in report writing, but always check what is required with your lecturer.

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Common to all reports

Title (found in all reports)
Make your title informative

Executive summary / Abstract

• Many readers will only read this so it needs to be informative, clear and brief.
• Provides an accurate, summary of the content of your report.
• The first sentence should articulate the main aim or question explored in your report.
• Should outline your approach to the research, the main theories you applied, and the most important findings or results of your research.
• Recommendations (if these were mentioned in the body of your report).

Table of contents

• The main sections/headings of the report and the page number on which they first appear.
• Generate this automatically from a styled MSWord document upon completion of the report.
Introduction (found in all reports)

- Set the report within a context of background information to illustrate the relevance or importance of your research.
- State the research aims: what is it your research will explore or demonstrate?
- Areas that may need to be covered in the introduction include:
  - Background: The significance of the report and why it was commissioned.
  - Purpose: State the aim clearly and succinctly.
  - Scope: What issues were covered, what were omitted?
  - Research method: How the data were obtained (e.g., interviews, surveys, literature review).
  - Definition of terms: Specific terms or concepts that need to be clarified or defined.

Literature review

- See Literature review guide.

Method

- State/define the methods you used to conduct your research (quantitative/qualitative; primary/secondary) and briefly provide a rationale for why this method was employed.
- Describe the conditions under which the research was conducted and the number of participants and how they were selected.

Results

- Present the main findings of your research, using sub-headings where appropriate.
- Order the results chronologically, or in any other appropriate way.

Discussion of results

- Analyse your findings at length and provide an explanation for why those results were obtained. You may state whether or not the results confirmed your initial hypothesis, whether they were expected and their possible significance.
- Present your findings or arguments in a logical manner according to the subject matter. You may also present options, alternatives or responses to specific situations or issues.

Conclusion (found in all reports)

- Summarise the purpose of the report, the methodology or theories employed, the key points or findings and the significance of those findings.
- Don’t introduce any new points, information or sources.

Recommendations

- Suggest ways in which problems identified in the report may be resolved.
- Provide information on how they can be implemented.
- Ensure a logical relationship between the previously discussed material and the recommendations.

Reference List (Found in all university reports)

- List alphabetically the sources referred to in the body of the report.
- Use APA end-text referencing for sources quoted, paraphrased or referred to in-text.
- Only include sources mentioned in the report.

Appendices

- This is for material you consider important but interferes with the flow of your discussion e.g. data, calculations, surveys, transcripts, graphics, maps, questionnaires, pamphlets etc.). Referred to in-text.
- Number each item, starting each item on a new page.
- Only include items mentioned in the report.

Contact
If you have any questions about this material, please contact ECU’s Learning Advisers at learningadviser@ecu.edu.au