

WHAT IS A REPORT?

A report is a factual account or record of something.

For example, school reports show how a student has done during the year; annual reports show the highlights of an organisation's year; financial reports list an organisation's income, expenditure and assets. In your organisation you may have had to read, or write:

- Incident or accident reports
- Reports that review or evaluate an event or activity
- Monthly or quarterly reports.

You may also have to write proposals, such as applying for funding or suggesting a new programme or event.

These are just a few of the different types of report that exist. Whatever the type of report, the information in it needs to be easy to find. This is one reason why reports are divided into sections, clearly labelled with headings and sub-headings.

Most reports have some things in common:

- A **title** - indicates what the report is about
- An **author** - shows who wrote the report
- A **contents page** (for larger reports) - showing what is in the report and on what page
- A **summary page** (sometimes called an executive summary) - giving a brief precis or summary of the report's contents, including the main findings and any recommendations
- An **introduction** - giving an overview of the main ideas in the report, to get the reader's attention
- The **'body'** of the report - containing all the information about the report topic, in a logical order, along with any photos, diagrams, graphs, statistics, quotes etc to support the information
- A **conclusion** - the 'rounding off' or the author's own summary based on the facts given in the body of the report



- **Recommendations** - the author's suggestions for actions or solutions that need to be taken
- A **bibliography or reference list**, showing any sources used when writing the report, such as books, brochures, websites, articles or other reports.

This is not usually required in a short report but may be needed in a major report, such as a proposal for funding or a history of an organisation.

Some workplaces have templates or forms for you to fill out when making a report. For example, many workplaces have specific forms that you must use to report on an accident or incident. These templates provide all the headings and sections you must fill in to complete your report.

However, if you have to write a report yourself, the tips on the next page will help you think about what to include and how to put it together.



A good way to think about structuring your report is by relating it to the layers of a hamburger. You have the:

- bread on top to attract the reader's attention - that's like the introduction and summary
- different interesting tasty bits inside - the main points and content (the body)
- more bread on the bottom - the conclusions and recommendations

GETTING STARTED

Once you are clear about the topic, plan a rough outline of what you want to include in your report. You don't have to start at the beginning. Find the part that appeals to you most or that you know most about, and start there.

Once you get on a roll and have noted down everything you want to cover, you can then put your notes into a logical order. People often write the introduction last because they have put all the rest of the report together and now know how they want to introduce it.

Think about who is going to read your report (your audience) and the sort of language and tone you should use. Most written reports are written quite formally, especially if they are to go to someone higher in your organisation, or outside of it.

Formal language means not using slang or jargon, and not using technical terms if you know that the reader will not understand them.

If you do use technical terms you might need to include a glossary (word list) at the back of the report to explain their meanings.

Write in short sentences. Have only one main idea or thought per paragraph. This will help keep the report flowing logically from the introduction to the conclusion, and make it easy for the reader to digest.

You want the reader to 'get' your report the first time they read it.

Once you've written a draft, re-read it several times to check that it flows, is logical and delivers what you intended.

You could ask a friend or colleague to read your report and ask for feedback. They may have some good ideas you could add.



CHECK WHAT YOU HAVE WRITTEN

Before you send out your report, or pass it on to your manager, make sure it:

- Is structured logically
- Has headings that identify the content of each section
- Contains factual, complete and relevant information
- Contains quality, detailed facts and figures, and acknowledges the source of these
- Uses appropriate vocabulary and tone
- Explains any technical terms in clear language
- Is in a suitable format that meets the requirements of your role and your organisation/workplace (you may have specific forms or templates you must use)
- Has no punctuation, spelling or grammatical errors that affect the intent of the report
- Has conclusions that are based on the facts presented
- Makes relevant recommendations

Use this check: If **you** were the reader and were seeing this report for the first time, would you understand it easily? Would you be convinced by it? Does it 'work'?

If you're not sure you can answer 'Yes' to these questions, have a look at your report again and make any final changes you think it needs.



KEY POINTS

- A report is a factual account of something that has happened or something you are proposing.
- Most reports have a common structure that includes a title, an author, an introduction, the body, a conclusion and recommendations.
- Longer reports may have an executive summary, a contents page, a bibliography and a glossary.
- Plan what you want to cover by writing down key points before you start.
- Structure your report logically to give it a good 'flow'.
- Use language and tone that are appropriate for the reader(s).
- Check the spelling and grammar - or ask someone else to do it for you.

WORDS TO REMEMBER

Acknowledge name, recognise

Appropriate suitable, correct, fitting the situation

Bibliography book list, references, list of sources

Executive summary overview, brief outline of the essential information in the report

Factual true, based on facts, real, actual

Format set-up, layout

Glossary word list, dictionary

Logical sensible, commonsense, practical

Proposal application, pitch for something

Recommendation suggestion, endorsement

Template master document, form

Vocabulary language, terms, words

Look at some of the reports you have to read at work, or that are available in your staff room or in workplace files. Look at the way they are laid out, the style of the writing, the headings and the language. Look at what tools they use to make them look more interesting, such as diagrams, graphs and tables.

Look at the templates you have to use in your organisation for reports such as health and safety issues, incidents and accidents.

The more reports you read or look at, the better ideas you will have for writing your own reports or completing workplace templates correctly. And the more you write, the more confident you will become.

This fact sheet will be useful when you are being assessed for **Unit Standard 3491 Writing a report** (Level 3,4 credits), or when you are writing any report in your workplace or in any other organisation you belong to.

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