

REPORT WRITING

What is report writing?

This form of writing is used in the general and social sciences, as well as business, so to be able to compile a good report is a very transferable academic skill. **A report is written with a clear purpose and for a specific audience and, as with all types of academic writing, clarity and conciseness is key.**

Before you begin your report writing exercise, **ensure that you are aware of any specific guidelines contained in your brief and also ensure that you use headings to guide your reader as you move from section to section.**

TOP TIP

All sources used in your analysis must be acknowledged and referenced throughout your report!

Writing the report: where do I start?

TOP TIP

Planning and preparing your report is key. You should decide on a clear structure before you begin to write the report and that will make the process much easier for you.

As with all types of academic writing, **reports should be clear and concise.** While the main areas to consider in report writing are described below, do remember that the first draft of any written assignment should not be the one that is submitted, and **it is vital that you leave adequate time for editing and proofreading.**

Understand the brief

The most important step is to unpack the brief you have been given and ensure you understand exactly what the purpose of your report is to be.

- **Who are you writing this report for, and why?**

- **Do you understand all of the directions** you are being given regarding this assignment brief?

If not, refer directly to your lecturer/tutor for clarification.

Compiling information

Think about where you might source the required information. This may come from a variety of sources, but how much information you will need is dictated by the degree of detail required in the report. **Reading relevant general literature is a good place to begin your research, and you can then focus on more specific forms of data-gathering such as surveys, questionnaires, etc.**

TOP TIP

Remember to refer constantly to the report brief and ask yourself, if and how the information will fit into your report.

Organising material

Once you have gathered your information you need to decide what is relevant and how you will present it. **Firstly, group together points that are related within specific sections or chapters. Your material should be ordered in a logical and coherent way throughout the report, so be ready to cut out any irrelevant material.**

Analysing material

It is not enough to just present the data and information you have gathered; you **must analyse it and apply it according to the issue outlined in your report brief**. So, once you have decided on what is relevant material for your report, ask yourself the following:

- **What conclusions can be drawn from the material?**
- **What are the limitations of or flaws in the evidence?**
- **Do certain pieces of evidence conflict with one another?**

It is not enough to simply present the information you have gathered; you must relate it to the problem or issue described in the report brief.

The first draft . . .

So, you have gathered your material and organised it into appropriate sections: now what?

Write concisely and clearly and directly make your points (do not leave room for confusion). Structure your paragraphs, sections and chapters as clearly as possible using the format below as a guide.

TOP TIP

You may find it easier to write the summary and contents page at the end when you know exactly what will be included.

- **Introduce** main idea of the paragraph/section/chapter.
- **Explain** and develop this idea, clearly defining any key terms.
- **Present** relevant evidence to support your point(s).
- **Comment** on each piece of evidence as you show how it directly relates to these point(s).
- **Conclude** the paragraph/section/chapter by either showing its significance to the report as a whole, or making a link to the next paragraph/section/chapter.

Reviewing, editing and redrafting

TOP TIP

Ideally, you should leave time between finishing the writing of your first draft and reviewing it: fresh eyes will catch more errors and omissions, than tired ones.

Review it from the perspective of the reader while asking yourself:

- **Is it easy to follow?**
- **Is there a clear and logical structure?**
- **Are the points clearly explained and supported by relevant evidence?**
- **Is the relevance of my findings clear** at each stage of my analysis?

Expect to make several amendments at this stage because, as mentioned before, the first draft is not the one which should be submitted - for that very reason!

TOP TIP

Organise your time properly: start early and make sure you have enough time to review and edit your report prior to submission!

Proofreading

Once you are satisfied with the content and structure of your redrafted report, you can turn your attention to proofreading the report and to its presentation. Always refer to the departmental guidelines included in your report brief, regarding the format and presentation.

1. Check that the **wording of each chapter/section/subheading is clear and accurate.**
2. Check for **consistency in numbering of chapters, sections and appendices.**
3. Ensure that **all your sources are acknowledged and correctly referenced.**

TOP TIP

Proofread your report for spelling, grammar and punctuation errors, which all create a poor impression and can make the report difficult to read and can also cost you marks.

Report structure

Title Page

This should briefly **describe the purpose of the report** (if this is not obvious from the title of the work). You may also include your name, the date and for whom the report is written.

Terms of Reference

Depending on the subject matter, it is possible to give a brief explanation of **why this report was written, the audience it is intended for and the methodology used** to compile it. It may be in the form of a subtitle or a single paragraph.

Summary

This is a brief description of the report content. Remember that this is the first impression that your work will make on the reader, so ensure it is a good one: clarity and conciseness should be your keywords here.

Table of contents

This would be specifically requested as part of the department guidelines. **This will allow your reader to scan and quickly find relevant information as required**, so be sure that you are consistent throughout with whichever numbering system you choose.

Which headings should I use?

Introduction

The introduction **serves as a framework for the main body of the report**. You may include **relevant background** history in this section. Explain the **aims and objectives** of the report, and also **acknowledge any limitations** within the scope of the research. **Introduce your methodology** and **highlight the parameters** of your research.

Methodology

Information discussed under this heading may include:

- **A list of equipment** used.
- **Explanations of procedures** followed.
- **Relevant information on materials used, including sources of materials.**
- **Details of any necessary preparation.**
- **Reference to any problems encountered and subsequent changes** in procedure.

Results

This section should include **a summary of the results** of the investigation or experiment. Also included should be **any diagrams, graphs or tables** of data gathered that support your results.

Your results should be presented **in a logical order, and without comments** (the discussion of these findings are reserved for the main body of the report).

Discussion

In this section, **you analyse and discuss the evidence you have gathered with specific reference to the problem or issue**. If your discussion section is lengthy you might divide it into section headings. Your points should be grouped and arranged in **an order that is logical and easy to follow**. You should use headings and can use subheadings to create

a clear structure for your material. Use bullet points to present a series of points in an easy-to-follow list. **It is worth repeating that all sources used throughout this section, as with the entire report, needs to be correctly cited and referenced.**

Conclusion

In this section, you **need to make the significance of your analysis and findings clear** to the reader. Perhaps you could **remind the reader of the most important points** made in the report or highlight what you consider to be the most central issues or findings. However, **no new material should be introduced in the conclusion.**

Appendices

This section should **include all the supporting and unpublished information** you have used in your report. This might include tables, graphs, questionnaires, surveys or transcripts. **Refer to the appendices in the body of your report.**

Bibliography

This section should contain a list of all published sources referred to in your research report. This should also be alphabetised. As different departments require different referencing styles, always refer to your own department to ensure you are using the correct one. You may also list texts which informed your research but which you did not directly refer to in your paper under a heading such as 'Background Reading': again, list these in alphabetical order using the same format as in your bibliography.

Acknowledgements

You may, where appropriate, **wish to acknowledge the assistance of particular organisations or individuals who provided information, advice or help.**

Glossary of Technical Terms

It is useful to provide an alphabetical list of technical terms with a brief, clear description of each term. You can also include in this section explanations of the acronyms, abbreviations or standard units used in your report.

TOP TIP

All of the headings above may not be required for your report nor will they necessarily be in the order given: always check departmental guidelines prior to commencing your report!

Useful links

- University of Leicester, 'Writing Reports', Available at: <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/writing/writing-resources/reports>
- University of Leeds, 'Report Writing', Available at: https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/14011/writing/114/report_writing
- Middlesex University London, Learning Enhancement Team, 'How to Write an Academic Report', Available at: https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0032/431888/LET-Report-Writing-Workshop.pdf
- Solent Online Learning, 'Successful Study Guide: Report Writing Checklist', Available at: <https://learn.solent.ac.uk/mod/book/view.php?id=116226&chapterid=15173>
- Using English for Academic Purposes for Students in Higher Education, 'Genres in academic writing: Reports', Available at: <http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/report.htm>
- PolyU ELC, 'Academic Report: Overall Structure', Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hNC_me9aVM

Other Relevant Online PDFs

- Time Management
- Academic Writing Essentials
- How to Write an Essay
- How to Build an Academic Argument
- Writing for the Sciences
- Lab Reporting
- Editing & Proofreading