



Report Writing

What is a report? How does it differ from an essay?

A report differs from an essay in that it is designed to present facts or results.

It is subdivided into numbered sections rather than a continuous piece writing.

A report could be based on a practical investigation, an experiment or an analysis of data, e.g. financial data.

An argument may be presented, but not in the form of a discussion, as you would expect from an essay.

What does a report look like?

The length varies from a couple of pages to several hundred depending on the scope of the brief.

Follow a logical structure, with clearly numbered section headings.

Include graphs and tables to illustrate the content.

A good report should:

It should analyse the problem you have been set, reveal how you reached your findings and come to clear conclusions and recommendations.

Be clear and concise - contents can be scanned quickly

What do you need to write a report?

Evidence - you will need to gather academic evidence information from books, journals and other sources (see the Finding Information section). You may also need additional data such as financial data from reputable sources.

A critical approach - To be able to write a report you need to think, read and write critically. (see critical thinking section)

Academic writing – reports are written in a formal academic writing style (see the academic writing style section)

Answer the report brief

Before you start any work on your report, ask yourself these questions:

What is the purpose of the report?

Read the brief carefully; identify the key words.

Who is the report for?

How much knowledge might the recipient have already? How much detail is required?

What sort of information will be relevant, and where can it be found?

Generating Ideas - Mind-mapping or brainstorming

The keywords should prompt ideas to form in your mind.

Make a note of the ideas as they happen

Don't worry about order or importance at this stage

Let your ideas flow!

Pattern notes are particularly useful – out your main topic in the middle and let ideas or factors radiate out (illustrate)

Once you have generated a mind-map you may wish to re-write into a logical order, rank the more important points first and group related points

If you don't know much about your topic, you may leave it at the mind-mapping stage and write your notes in a more logical flow once you have read around on the topic.

Gathering Evidence

You may include some secondary sources of information such as textbooks or journal articles providing a literature review or commentary on a topic, but reports usually require reference to primary sources, ie., original data such as statistics, financial data and research trial results.

This data can be obtained from various sources:

Journal articles reporting primary research results

Government websites such as Office for National Statistics

London Stock Exchange

Company websites

Other quality websites.

Referencing

Make sure that you make a note of every book, article and website you have consulted as you carry out your research, so that you can create a bibliography when you come to compile the report. You may wish to create a Refworks account to manage your references. See the referencing section for further guidance.

Report structure

There is a generally accepted format for reports.

However, there is some variation and you may not be required to include all of the sections.

Check your assignment brief and if in doubt check with your tutor before writing or submitting your work.

Structure

Title Page - title should be brief and accurately reflect the subject of the report. Include author and date of completion, module etc...

TOC - Make sure the pages and headings are numbered

List the headings you have given to each section of the report, together with the page number.

Abstract or summary

Brief Summary of the essential points - purpose, scope, methods, findings, conclusions and recommendations. However, do not write in note or list form. It usually represents about 10% of the report word count.

Introduction

Set the scene for the reader - what is the report about? You may discuss previous research and methodology if you have not been asked to do separate Literature Review and Methodology sections.

Literature review

A critical evaluation of relevant past research. It should be written like an essay - an introduction, main discussion grouped in themes and a conclusion demonstrating how your proposed study will contribute to the current literature. (Make sure you use the library academic databases to review research literature. Click here for help with finding information.)

Methodology

You need to explain exactly what you did and why. Justify the methods/techniques chosen, e.g. why did you use questionnaires or a particular type of experiment or particular sample size?

Results

Pick out the key results and present the rest in an appendix. Describe, analyse, interpret and evaluate the data. Use graphs and illustrations.

Conclusions

This should sum up the main points of your report and draw your conclusions. Any weakness or flaws in your research should be acknowledged. Locate recommendations here or in a separate section depending on the length and complexity of your report.

Recommendations

Suggestions for improvements or future actions, based on the conclusions you have drawn earlier.

Bibliography

The bibliography lists all the publications either cited in the report or referred to during its composition. You may also find the Referencing & Plagiarism section useful.

Appendix

This contains material referred to in the report, which would interrupt the flow if it were included in the main body of the text, but which may be useful for your reader to refer to. Examples include large amounts of statistical data or calculations, questionnaires that you have used, a glossary of technical terms, maps, etc.

Presentation and language

Content is key, but first impressions are important!

Your report should look polished and professional.

Make sure your report is well presented, with correct information on the title page, numbered pages, and clearly labelled and numbered sections.

Make sure you have followed the structure and style specified in your assignment brief.

Use formal academic language and be as brief and concise as possible.

Final Checks

Before submitting your report, read it again and check the following:

Proof read for typos and other errors

Does the report answer the question(s) it was meant to?

Have you included enough evidence?

Is it logical in presentation and structure?

Are the page and heading numbering correct?

Summary

Answer the question set

Gather evidence

Structure your report in the required way

Check presentation and language

Final checks

Access LEAP Online at: www.bolton.ac.uk/leaponline