

Report Writing

Structural and Language features
and Critical Questions

Why a Report?

- A report is the formal writing up of yours or others' research or project work or to review the literature on a topic and report major issues
- Reports in academia, the workplace and other organisations are serious documents that are studied intently to guide thoughts and decision - making

Writing Reports

- A good report:
means the writer has a clear idea of the *purpose* and *scope* of the report

General Information

- Purpose (the reason for the report):
ensure that what is researched and written is relevant
- Scope (the range and depth needed):
obtain clear guidelines from your lecturer, tutor or supervisor as to what elements are needed (eg. the requirement for figures, tables, recommendations, appendices)

- Reports may be:
- Routine – regular progress checks
 - daily reports
 - weekly safety reports
 - monthly progress reports
- Special – investigatory reports designed to help identify and solve particular problems

Report Type

- Routine reports generally have a standard form to complete, often by inserting appropriate ticks or numbers. They are quick and easy to fill in, but do not allow for unusual findings or complex answers
- Special reports, because they have their own purpose and requirements, are more variable and offer the writer greater discretion as to what to include and what conclusions may be drawn.

What follows is specific to these special reports

Task, Purpose and Report Type

➤ Task:

Your Uni Club is considering banning drinking in selected areas. In order to present the case to the management Committee, the club manager has asked you to survey student reactions to this proposal

Task, Purpose and Report Type

➤ Purpose:

To gather my own data, ie – conduct my own research and report my findings

Task, Purpose and Report Type

- Which Report most closely fits the assignment?

Research Report

Task, Purpose and Report Type

- Task:

Your Uni Club is considering banning drinking in selected areas. The Management Committee of the club is meeting to make the decision. Evaluate the effectiveness of the members' participation in the decision – making process/es

Task, Purpose and Report Type

➤ Purpose:

To evaluate a workplace or human activity

Task, Purpose and Report Type

➤ Which Report most closely fits the assignment?

Evaluative Report

Task, Purpose and Report Type

➤ Task:

Your Uni Club is considering banning drinking in selected areas. In order to help to present the case to the management Committee, the club manager has asked you to investigate and evaluate the health risks associated with drinking.

Task, Purpose and Report Type

➤ Purpose:

To review the literature on a topic and report the major issues and findings

Task, Purpose and Report Type

- Which Report most closely fits the assignment?

research by Reading Report

Presentation

Reports are structured similarly so that information is found quickly when reading and discussing

Short Formal Report Structure (General)

- Introduction
- Summary
- Methods of Research
- Findings or Analysis
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

Long Formal Report Structure (General)

- Title Page
- Letter of Transmittal
- Table of Contents
- List of Tables and Illustrations
- Synopsis / Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Methods of Research
- Findings / Analysis
- Conclusions
- Recommendations
- Appendix

Research Report Structure

Executive Summary (or Summary / Abstract)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>Features of the writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Purpose➤ Background
➤ Description of method➤ Main results➤ Conclusion➤ Recommendation
➤ N.B. write the exec. Summary last, after you know what you have written➤ Use past tense | <p>Questions to ask yourself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ What is the aim of the report?➤ Do the readers need any background information?➤ How was the data collected?➤ What were the main findings?➤ What is my conclusion?➤ What recommendations would I make? |
|---|--|

Example

Research Report Structure Introduction

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>Features of the writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ State purpose➤ Set context➤ Set limits of report➤ Definition of essential concepts to avoid misinterpretation by reader➤ Background about context of situation➤ Report the literature in the field to identify the problem or 'gap' in knowledge to be investigated
➤ N.B. tense is predominantly present | <p>Questions to ask yourself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ What is the aim of the report?
➤ Are there any limitations to the study?➤ Do I need to define essential terms?➤ What background information do I need to give the reader?➤ Do I need to cite the literature in this field? (this may be included under a separate heading- 'Review of Literature') |
|--|---|

Research Report Structure Method

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>Features of the writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Paragraph structure – all information relates to the information in the Theme position of the topic statement.
➤ N.B. written in a concise style, giving precise detail.➤ Be factual, no interpretations.➤ Mainly past tense➤ 'appendix' refers to one; 'appendices' are more than one | <p>Questions to ask yourself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ How was information gathered? (give details)➤ What was used?➤ How many? (transects /people / questionnaires)➤ Who?➤ Why?➤ When?➤ Where?➤ Why was this data gathering method used?
➤ N.B. The logical order of these questions will vary with each report |
|--|--|

Research Report Structure Results

- | Features of the writing | Questions to ask yourself |
|--|---|
| ➤ Facts only, no interpretation | ➤ What happened? |
| ➤ Paragraph structure – all information relates to the information in the Theme position of the topic statement. | ➤ What did I find? |
| ➤ If tables are inserted then they must be referred to in the text | ➤ How can I show the findings? |
| | ➤ Will I use tables or graphs, etc? |
| | ➤ How will I refer to my tables / graphs within the report? |
| ➤ N.B. note tables and their page references are included at the end of the contents | |
| ➤ Lists and point form are appropriate | |

Research Report Structure Discussion / Interpretation of Results

- | Features of the writing | Questions to ask yourself |
|---|---|
| ➤ Interpret now: Findings in the results are discussed and interpreted | ➤ How will I organise the information? |
| ➤ Support your finding / interpretation with reference to the literature | ➤ Which points do I want to discuss from the Results? |
| ➤ Acknowledge contrary evidence and demonstrate its unsuitability | ➤ Which are the most / least important? |
| ➤ N.B. Use headings that are related to findings | ➤ Which headings will I use? |
| ➤ Ensure that sentence that follows the heading is a complete idea and does not just finish off the heading | ➤ Which literature supports my findings? |
| ➤ Paragraph Structure: when presenting an argument the ideas most often link from the end of one sentence to the beginning of the next | ➤ Is there any contrary evidence that I have to acknowledge? |
| | ➤ How strong is it? |

Research Report Structure Conclusion

- | Features of the writing | Questions to ask yourself |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ This section can be your comments, but they must be based on information already reported and discussed.➤ N.B. No new information is given | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ What is the 'answer'? |

Research Report Structure Recommendation (optional)

- | Features of the writing | Questions to ask yourself |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ An introduction to justify limitations to the study or the changes to be recommended could be included if not already covered in the conclusion➤ N.B. Note the language – eg: 'recommended that'➤ Listings can be used | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ What changes can I suggest as a result of my findings and the evidence?➤ How could this happen? (not usually answered unless specifically identified in the assignment criteria) |

Research Report Structure References

- | | |
|--|---|
| Features of the writing | Questions to ask yourself |
| ➤ Consult you faculty handbook and library and computing website for referencing style relating to your discipline | ➤ What theory / evidence did I consult (both generally / specifically) within the topic |

Research Report Structure Appendices

- | | |
|--|---|
| Features of the writing | Questions to ask yourself |
| ➤ Questionnaires, transcripts, pamphlets, written correspondence and raw data to be included in this section | ➤ What information do I need to include for the reader's information that is not essential in the body, but may be necessary for study replication? |

Evaluative Report Structure Summary

- | Features of the writing | Questions to ask yourself |
|--|---|
| ➤ Write the summary last, after the whole report has been written up | ➤ What did I do? |
| ➤ If relevant, mention the implications or unresolved issues | ➤ Why did I do it? |
| | ➤ What happened? |
| | ➤ What do the results mean in theory? |
| | ➤ What do the results mean in practice? |
| ➤ N.B. Note the use of past tense | ➤ What is the key benefit for the reader/s? |
| | ➤ What is left unresolved? |

Evaluative Report Structure Introduction

- | Features of the writing | Questions to ask yourself |
|---|--|
| ➤ State purpose | ➤ What is the purpose of my report? |
| ➤ State criteria for observation and judgement | ➤ Which criteria will I use to evaluate the process? |
| ➤ You could include your overall judgement here if you wish (or leave until the conclusion) | ➤ What is my overall conclusion? |
| | ➤ Are there any essential terms that I need to define? |
| ➤ N.B. Note change of tense | ➤ What else do I think the readers ought to know? |
| | ➤ Are there any limitations to the research method chosen? |

Evaluative Report Structure

The Theoretical Background (Decision – making process)

Features of the writing

- Your purpose is to identify to the reader the relevant theory and perhaps differences between different writers' ideas and to identify the criteria for your analysis
- Provide background facts about the group (sometimes called the procedure or methodology in other reports) and the situation to set the scene
- N.B. This could be included as part of the Introduction, depending upon length

Questions to ask yourself

- Which theoretical background on decision- making?
- What is relevant to this assignment? Will I focus my analysis in a particular way? (eg. Leadership? Communication?)
- Do I want to have a separate theoretical section or include it as part of the Observations and Evaluation / Interpretation section?
- What general information would the reader need to have about the group and the situation observed?
- Who were the participants?
- What was the purpose?

Evaluative Report Structure

Reporting the Results and Discussing them

- You can organise this section in a variety of ways depending on the amount of repetition in your report. You need to attend to your structuring here.
- The following are some options:

Evaluative Report Structure Reporting the Results and Discussing them

1. Separate the Observations (or results) and Evaluation / Interpretation (ie. Discussion) sections

– place all the facts first and then interpret them.

Evaluative Report Structure Reporting the Results and Discussing them Observations

Features of the writing

- This section can be organised chronologically or by issues – depending on your task
- It can be difficult to be totally factual when interpreting behaviour eg. *** was angry! (*How do you know?*)

Questions to ask yourself

- What did I observe (facts only)
- What was the outcome?

Evaluative Report Structure

Reporting the Results and Discussing them

Evaluation / Interpretation

Features of the writing

- The focus now is the assessment / understanding of the behaviours / issues

Questions to ask yourself

- How will I interpret the behaviours I observed?
- What does the theory have to say about these behaviours?
- How effective were the behaviours or outcomes when compared with the theory?

Evaluative Report Structure

Reporting the Results and Discussing them

2. Combine these two sections (Observations and Evaluation / Interpretation) into one large section that you can sub-title according to the criteria / aspects you are dealing with.

If you choose this construction then each paragraph will have a number of features:

Evaluative Report Structure

Reporting the Results and Discussing them

- a. State the relevant feature of the theory
- b. Relate what actually happened in practice
- c. Describe and explain the impact of this behaviour
- d. Relate to the theory again
- e. Evaluate and decide the implications

Evaluative Report Structure

Reporting the Results and Discussing them

Observations, Evaluation & Interpretation

(combined)

- | Features of the writing | Questions to ask yourself |
|--|--|
| ➤ This section need to shift between the practice, theory and back to the practice again | ➤ What were / are the consequences / implications of such behaviour? |
| ➤ Another option is to begin the paragraph/s with the behaviour observed and then relate to the theory | ➤ What does the theory have to say about the consequences? |
| | ➤ Are there alternatives that could be / were considered? |
| | ➤ How effective would they be / are they? |

Evaluative Report Structure
Reporting the Results and Discussing them
Treated Separately or Combined
Remember!

- In both options you must examine the implications of the behaviour for the quality of the decision - making

Evaluative Report Structure
Conclusion

- | Features of the writing | Questions to ask yourself |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ This section can be your comments, but they must be based on information already reported and discussed.
➤ N.B. No new information is given | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ What is my 'answer'?➤ How effective is the group's decision – making process?
if relevant:➤ What are the limitations of this research?➤ What work is there still to be done in this area? |

Evaluative Report Structure Recommendations (optional)

Features of the writing

- An introduction to justify limitations to the study or the changes to be recommended could be included if not already covered in the conclusion
- N.B. Note the language – eg: 'it is recommended that'

Questions to ask yourself

- What recommendations would you make?

Evaluative Report Structure References

Features of the writing

- Consult your faculty handbook and library and computing website for referencing style relating to your discipline

Questions to ask yourself

- What theory / evidence did I consult (both generally / specifically) and refer to within the topic / assignment?

Evaluative Report Structure Appendices

Features of the writing

- Questionnaires, transcripts, notes, pamphlets could be included in this section

Questions to ask yourself

- What information do I need to include for the reader's information that is not essential to the body of the work?

Research by Reading Report Structure Abstract

Features of the writing

- The Abstract covers each section of your report, in logical order
- Write the Abstract last, after you know what you have written
- N.B. Use past tense

Questions to ask yourself

- What is my purpose?
- What did I find out?
- What is my conclusion (based on my findings)?
- What recommendations am I able to make?

Research by Reading Report Structure Introduction

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>Features of the writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ State purpose➤ Background information➤ Set limits of the report➤ Definition of essential concepts to avoid misinterpretation by reader | <p>Questions to ask yourself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Why am I writing this report?➤ Do I need to set the context and explain the background to the report?➤ Will I limit my investigation in any way?➤ How?➤ Do I need to show my interpretation of any basic concepts? <p>N.B. the logical order of these questions will vary with each report</p> |
|--|---|

Research by Reading Report Structure Findings

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>Features of the writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Identify main point➤ Support the point by referring to the literature / readings➤ Give contrary evidence and demonstrate its weakness➤ Interpretation of findings <p>N.B. Ensure that the sentence that follows a headline is a complete idea and does not merely finish off the heading</p> | <p>Questions to ask yourself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ What did I find out?➤ What are the issues?➤ How do I decide which issues / points are important?➤ What points do I want to make? |
|--|--|

Research by Reading Report Structure Discussion

Features of the writing

- The points are linked to the context of situation to demonstrate their relevance

N.B. Point form is acceptable when listing

Questions to ask yourself

- How do my findings relate to the situation?
- Is there any supporting evidence that I can use that also relates to policies and their implementation in this situation?

Research by Reading Report Structure Conclusion

Features of the writing

- No new information.
- Make sure that all points mentioned here have already been identified and discussed in the body of the report

Questions to ask yourself

- What is my answer?

Research by Reading Report Structure Recommendations (optional)

Features of the writing

- An introduction to justify the changes to be recommended could be included if not already covered in the conclusion
- Listing can be used

N.B. Note the language –
'recommended that...'

Questions to ask yourself

- What changes can I suggest as a result of my findings and the evidence?
- Do I have to say how this could happen? (not unless the assignment asks you to do this)

Research by Reading Report Structure References

Features of the writing

- Consult your faculty handbook and library and computing website for referencing style relating to your discipline

Questions to ask yourself

- Which sources did I refer to within the report?

Research by Reading Report Structure Appendices

Features of the writing

Questions to ask yourself

- Do I have any information that is not essential in the body of the work?
(probably not for a research report)

General Information

- Make the job as easy as possible for yourself:
 1. Write the sections in whichever order is easiest for you
 2. Once written, rearrange them into the structure your subject requires (or the order previously outlined)

General Information

- Procedure for Writing the Report:
 1. Draw up a working outline
 2. Collect data
 3. Analyse, review and re-organise your data
 4. Write the body (discussion section of the report)
 5. Develop conclusions and recommendations
 6. Write the abstract
 7. Proof – Read and re-edit

Check!

- Use headings for each section to indicate what it covers and sub-headings to introduce different subject matter.
- Number sub – headings.
- Data must be clear and accurate and presented in tables, charts or graphs if appropriate. Tables specifying your main results may be part of the main report; other data is usually put into numbered appendices. In the text, refer the reader to each appendix by number.
- The description of your methods must be precise enough to allow somebody else to duplicate your research exactly.
- Check that each element of material is under the right heading. It is very easy to become absorbed with developing an idea and include material from a later section.

References

- Rogan, Heather. Study Guides Writing Reports. Massey University, Auckland: Student Learning Services, 1998.
- Cottrell, Stella. The Study Skills Handbook. Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999.
- Brown, Robert F. and Douglas J. Hargreaves. "A Five Question Structure to Engineer Better Student Reports." Aiming for Quality in Engineering Students: Proceedings of the 5th Annual Convention and Conference of the Australasian Association for Engineering Education." New Zealand, Dec. 1993.