



Writing a report

Report writing is an essential skill for many professionals. Its intention is to inform the reader about a piece of research or project work. It should be clear and concise.

A report tends to have a formal style of writing, presenting information and analysis, rather than argument or creativity. It will be structured with an introduction, main body and conclusion, often split up into other more detailed headings and sub-headings and include tables or graphs to explain things more clearly.

Getting started

Have you been given any particular instructions, e.g. word length; headings; things you must include?

Who is your audience?

Writing the report

Remember, a report should be concise and accurate. When you have written it, check that it answers the assignment you were set and follows any instructions you were given. In addition, check that your conclusions make sense from the results and that you can justify what you have written.

Note: you don't have to write the introduction first. You'll see that some sections follow on logically from others: method > results > discussion > conclusions. You may find it easier to start with these.

On the next page there is a sample report structure, showing the different sections and what to put in each. This is only a general guide – your tutor may ask you to follow a specific format.

Sample report structure

Title	Make it clear and precise.
Introduction	Say what the report covers, its scope and context. Clarify any key terms. What were you trying to find out? What have other researchers written about this topic?
Method	What did you actually do?
Results	Present your results. You may want to include tables or graphs. If you have lots of data, decide what is important enough to include.
Discussion	Explain what you discovered. Analyse the data. Identify patterns or trends. Does it fit with what you expected? Any surprises? Does it raise additional questions? Can you think of any improvements on carrying out the study?
Conclusions	<p>Sum up the main points from the report. Don't add new information here. Do any recommendations for future action follow on from your results?</p> <p>Don't rush to hasty conclusions and be cautious about claims that you make. Use qualifying statements to show that you are aware of the limitations of the study.</p>
References	If you have referred to other research in your report, give details of your sources.
Appendices	If you have material which is too detailed for the main body of the report, you may decide to put it in an appendix at the back. For example, a copy of the questionnaire you sent out or a spreadsheet of data. Refer to it in your text.