

Report Writing: Key Points

1. What is report writing?
2. General principles of report writing
3. Why write a report?
4. How to write a report
5. Proof-reading tips and tricks

1. What is report writing?

The report is a document designed to deal with the real world – specifically, a report is a practical document that describes, deals or analyses a situation such that the reader can take specific actions about the situation.

The report as a whole asks if there is a problem. The conclusion draws the various elements of this question together, typically acknowledging that there is a problem and breaking it down into its component parts, and the recommendations suggest the range of options available to solve the problem.

2. General principles of report writing

- Read the journals for your subject. Note the way they structure arguments, the way they use evidence and the layout and style of their articles.
- Think about what a report does – *Which* report, for example, allows readers to judge different items against disclosed criteria. The readers can then decide what to do, depending on their own criteria for action.
- Clarify your aims before you start – Is your report factual (expected to establish a current situation)? Instructional (expected to suggest a range of options)? Persuasive (expected to investigate a problem and suggest a range of options for further action)?

3. Why write a report?

- If your report is factual, you will be gathering information to explain or define a situation.
- If your report is instructional, you will be gathering information to explain a problem and offer a range of solutions
- If your report is persuasive, you will be gathering the information to explain a problem and recommend a solution.

Consider the following: who is the reader? What do I want my reader to think? What do I want my reader to do? What will I need to tell my reader to get them there? In what order?

4. How to write a report

Typical report structure:

- a. Title page
- b. Contents
- c. Introduction
- d. Methodology
- e. Findings
- f. Conclusion
- g. Recommendations
- h. Bibliography
- i. Appendices
- j. Glossary

Tips:

- Check out the contents pages of books. Do they help you as a reader? Make yours just as useful.
- The methodology: the research methods you used to put the report together – a literature review or interviews and questionnaires.
- Each finding should have a conclusion and each conclusion should lead to a recommendation.
- Decide where you will number, underline, embolden, italicise; save a template and use it every time you start work; check for a department style and use that.

5. Proofreading tips and tricks

Proof-reading is not really about re-writing something, but about going through to pick up simple typographical errors, spelling mistakes and faulty syntax.

- Swap work with a friend. Proof-read each other's reports.
- Proof-read from end to beginning – this disrupts expectations
- Cover your work with a sheet of paper and proof-read as you read.

10 tips

- Read journals for your subject.
- Think about what a report does.
- Clarify your aims before you start.
- Gather information to explain or define a situation.
- Consider who the reader is.
- Consider what you will need to tell your reader to get them there.
- Remember that each finding should have a conclusion.
- Check department style and use that.
- Swap with a friend – proof-read each other's reports.
- Proof-read from end to beginning – this disrupts expectations.