

1.5 Professional reports

Skills	Criteria
Plan and manage tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The report is on schedule• All relevant aspects are considered
Research information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appropriate sources are consulted• Sufficient sources are consulted• Sources of data are well documented
Organise information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appropriate headings• Integrated structure, ie arguments and conclusions match purpose• Alternative views are considered
Write clearly and concisely	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arguments are clear and concise

See 2.11

See 2.6

Definition

A formal account of a situation produced after consideration of all relevant factors. In the commerce workplace, much of the writing will be in the form of a report. The report is based on research, with evidence provided from the literature as well as from research undertaken by the investigator. The argument is drawn from professional practice, using the language of business appropriate to the audience.

Purpose

To inform senior management or a client about a particular issue, often for the purpose of future decision making.

Audience

Your audience may be the managing director of your company, its shareholders, people in a government department or rival firms, or indeed potential clients. Your audience and their needs will influence what you put in your report, and how you present it.

Structure

The length of a Professional Report varies according to the problem. Concise reports for managers rarely extend beyond three pages, while reports that have been prepared by consultancies may extend to 30 or 60 pages or more. Thus, two structures are presented. The first is commonly used for full length and consultancy style management reports, while the second structure is more suitable for concise reports to management on a specific problem.

Structure of a Long Report

Title page	Report title, author name, course and tutorial, tutor's name, date
Table of contents	All sections and appendices listed and numbered; page numbers provided
List of illustrations, tables, figures	Lists of these, numbered correctly, with page numbers
Executive summary	Brief statement of purpose, argument and recommendations
Introduction	Context, background; purpose and scope of report; explanation of report organisation
Body of report	Analysis and discussion under headings
Conclusion	Summary or restatement of main issues. Basis for recommendations. May indicate 'next step'. May comment on the limitations of the research (such as generalisability, availability of data)
Recommendations	Most important first; based on conclusions; specific; practical
References	Use Footnote System
Appendices	Technical information such as interview schedule used, organisation documentation, spreadsheets and statistics

See 1.6

See 2.7

See 2.13

Structure of a Concise Report

Title page	Report title, author name, course and tutorial, tutor's name, date
Table of contents	Lists and numbers all sections and appendices; provides page numbers
Executive summary	Brief statement of purpose Summary of discussion Recommendations
Body of report	Background information Analysis and discussion Recommendations
Conclusion	Summary or restatement of the main issues
Appendix	Highly technical information e.g. Spreadsheets, Statistics

See 1.6

Note: The Commerce Communication Skills website contains a worked example of a concise report ('Writing Readable Reports') and an example of a Grade Sheet for Accounting Method I.

Language and style

Reports have a formal tone to suggest impartiality of the analysis and discussion. Your writing should be clear and concise and display **good style**, taking account of the report's purpose and the audience's needs. Your voice and words should be your own. Use headings to guide the reader.

See 2.8

Steps

See 2.7

1. Identify which data you will need to collect to satisfy the given purpose, and how you can obtain that information.
2. Read **critically and analytically** about the topic: interpret, compare information, work out relationships, check relevance.
3. Form an argument and organise the evidence for and against. Develop your recommendations.
4. Outline your report sections. (Check whether all sections are required.)
5. Write a draft: develop your argument; provide evidence for your argument; present alternative views; justify your argument; build logical links; avoid plagiarism; cite sources correctly; write clearly and concisely; format the report.
6. Check that your argument and recommendations meet the purpose; check structure, language and style; check flow of argument; copy edit; cross-check references in report and reference list.
7. Prepare appendices, place in order of referral from your text and also number in that order.
8. Final preparation: proof read; check that all report elements are present and in the correct order; check grammar and spelling.

Hints

See 2.11

1. Be clear when you are stating your opinion and when the **views of others**, eg *The manager indicated that ...* and *The findings suggest that ...*.
2. Where appropriate, use direct quotations from research to illustrate key points, but avoid excessive use of quotations.

Useful references

Allen, J. (1998) *Writing in the Workplace*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

Bryman, A. (1989) *Research Methods and Organisational Studies*. Unwin Hyman, London.

Winckel, A. and Hart, B. (1996), *Report Writing Style Guide for Engineering Students*, University of South Australia, Adelaide.

Windschuttle, K. and Elliott, E. (1994), *Writing, Researching, Communicating: Communication Skills for the Information Age*, 2nd edition, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Sydney.

See 2.8

See the **School of Commerce website** for examples and further advice.