

# Writing a Report

Reports are an extremely important means of communication within an organization. The ideas expressed in reports are often used as a basis for action or to make a decision of some sort.

Always write your report with this in mind:

- That you know the purpose of your report;
- That you are able to provide all the facts and ideas about situations;
- That someone else who may or may not know the whole situation is going to be reading it, commenting on it, discussing it and ultimately making a decision based upon it.

A good report shows the qualities of accuracy, orderliness, precision, clarity and persuasion, and is achieved through methodical, solid work.

## How to Prepare Your Report

There are ten stages in report preparation:

1. **Consider the aim of the report and who will read it.**  
Have a definite idea why you are writing the report, who will be using it and what decisions may arise from it.
2. **Plan your investigative approach.**  
Decide how you will gather information, who you will survey, which experts you will consult, what sources you will research. How much time will you need to complete this research?
3. **Gather information.**  
Primary sources – interviews, questionnaires, records, files and letters – material that you must analyse and interpret – actual documents and first-hand sources.  
Secondary sources – printed or published material that someone else has written.  
Check for bias, prejudice or self-interest in this material.
4. **Organise the information you have gathered.**  
Arrange the material you have gathered into broad divisions within your topic. These will give you the basis for your writing plan. Work out some way to arrange or code the information into groups.
5. **Analyse the draft.**  
Interpret the results of your research (e.g. questionnaire, survey, etc.) and evaluate it. What does it all mean?
6. **Decide on your conclusions.**  
Summarise your main ideas on what your findings revealed, making sure that the conclusions you draw are supported by your findings.

**7. Decide on your recommendations.**

Your recommendations must make sense against the backdrop of facts and arguments presented in the body of your report. In fact, anyone reading your report should be able to foresee your recommendations before they actually read them because they form a logical extension of the arguments presented. Recommendations are usually numbered.

**8. Plan the writing.**

Plan your report. Make a list of the paragraphs or topics you will be covering and the main points you will cover in each. Work out your numbering system (e.g. 3.0 Main title, 3.1 First subheading, 3.2 Second subheading etc.)

**9. Writing the draft.**

A good report should include:

- Title Page
- Table of Contents
- Synopsis
- Introduction (statement of problem, background information, purpose of report, method of investigation)
- Findings (subdivided into parts)
- Conclusion
- Recommendations
- References
- Appendices

**10. Edit and prepare the final copy.**

Don't skimp on this stage of writing. You've spent a lot of time researching your report, so it would be a shame to waste that effort by handing in a second-rate or poorly edited report! Be highly critical when you check your work, looking for false or inaccurate statements, unsupported opinions, irrelevance, imprecise and unclear language or longwindedness.

In summary:

- Use separate pages for most sections;
- Use headings and a numbering system for sections;
- Give quotations from experts, facts and figures to support your opinions;
- Acknowledge your sources in-text (Name, year, page for quotations);
- Be precise;
- Use formal impersonal language;
- Use clear language and short paragraphs;
- Label diagrams and tables
- Reference using the Harvard system.

Take a real pride in presenting an excellent report!