

REPORT WRITING PROCESS

A report presents the results of an investigation of a topic or issue in a formal objective manner. Recommendations are frequently made to solve a problem or to indicate directions for further research.

1. Analyse the task

- Identify the purpose and the audience.
 - The purpose statement contains words like: ‘The aim of this research is to investigate/ analyse/ ...’
 - The audience is the person who has commissioned the research, i.e. the decision maker, e.g. the client or manager. This determines the level of detail included.
- Decide on the sections of the report. (See over for a guide. You may not need all these headings and you may create your own. If you are not sure what sections are required, consult your lecturer.)

2. Brainstorm to determine the issues

- Bring all your ideas together on one page to:
 - decide which issues and topics are relevant to the purpose of your research
 - create a preliminary outline of headings to ensure the relevance of these issues to the purpose
 - identify possible sources of information (primary and secondary) to address the issues
- Mind maps are very useful at this stage. (See study tip on mind mapping for more information).

3. Collect the information

- Gather information from both primary and secondary sources – use recommended texts and library material first. Select the most credible and reliable sources of information to address the issues.
- Conduct any tests, surveys or other research tasks; make notes on the findings.
- Look for ways to structure the sections of the report in order to integrate your results and research.
- Record bibliographic details of all references used — to ensure accuracy, save time and avoid plagiarism.

4. Sort the information and plan an outline

- Draw your conclusions first: this is what you are reporting on.
- Organise the information under appropriate headings and subheadings. The plan should include:
 - findings: main points with suitable subheadings to indicate the topic
 - a brief outline of the introduction—with the purpose and scope—and the methodology (if required)
 - discussion points: evidence and arguments related to your conclusions and recommendations

5. Finalise your research

- This is focused research, providing evidence from other studies to expand on your main points.
- Refine your search terms to locate precise and current information and evidence in academic journals from library databases. Use efficient reading strategies to locate the information (Study Tip: Efficient reading).

6. Write the report

- Write the introduction and methodology first; then write the findings, the discussion and conclusions, each clearly related to the purpose; write the recommendations and create a suitable title for the report.
- Finalise the subheadings for each of the findings, and for each main point in the discussion section
- Remember, a paragraph must contain one main idea—stated in the topic sentence. Other sentences explain, support and give evidence from the literature, and/or provide examples. Refer to graphics, figures and tables, etc. in the paragraphs. Make sure these illustrations are clearly labelled.
- Reference carefully. You must always acknowledge the source of information, whether quoting directly or paraphrasing; the sources of images, graphics and formulae must also be acknowledged.

7. Edit and proofread

- Focus on logic and coherence first. Then proof read for spelling, punctuation and grammar errors. Finally, check the layout, table of contents, graphics, captions, references, title page, headers and footers, etc.
- Is the report clear, concise, complete, coherent and correct? Is the language objective and formal?

STUDY TIPS

- Save additional copy of the submitted report in another location, e.g. RMIT H-drive, USB, laptop, cloud, etc.

Sections of a report

Note: This overview reflects the sections most commonly used in reporting empirical and/or scientific research. Create alternative and additional headings and sub-headings according to the report's content and purpose.

Section	Content
Title page	Title – indicates the purpose of the report Details of the person(s) for whom the report was prepared Details of the person(s) who prepared the report (student name and ID) Due date
Table of contents	Shows the headings and subheadings of sections of the report Created automatically in word-processing programs if headings are in the correct 'heading' styles
Executive summary/ abstract	Outlines: purpose, (research method), findings, main conclusions and recommendations Written last: provides a summary of the whole report: reader can easily identify what, how, why
Introduction	Outlines purpose, context, background and rationale Defines key terms and sets limits of the research Identifies the existing situation and refers to relevant literature
Methodology (where required)	Explains how the research was conducted and/or outlines exactly how the data was collected and analysed
Results/ findings (may be combined with discussion)	Presents the findings of the research in paragraphs Facts only – no interpretation Often includes graphic forms (e.g. tables, illustrations and graphs) with labels/captions Contains headings and subheadings
Discussion/ analysis	Presents an interpretation, analysis and evaluation of the results of the research under suitable headings Analyses findings related to the purpose: draws together different aspects of the findings, and relates them to other studies, referring to literature
Conclusion/s (may be combined with recommendations)	Brief statement of what was found and its significance: an analysis and evaluation of the report's main facts No new information
Recommendations	Suggests suitable changes/ possible solutions to the problems in separate points
References	A list of full bibliographic details of all references used in the report Use the referencing style required by the course/discipline, e.g. APA, IEEE, author-date ('Harvard'), Chicago documentary-note, etc.
Appendix/ appendices	Attachment/s of additional supporting information (e.g. raw data, surveys, questionnaires, detailed statistics, glossary, etc.)