

# Professional Report Writing

IMSD

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## Agenda

1. What is a report?
2. Why write reports?
3. What makes a “good” report?
4. How do we produce a good report?
5. The essentials of professional report writing
6. Other considerations
7. Addressing specific audiences

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# 1 What is a report?

## What is a report?

A written document describing the findings of an individual or group

(Web definition)

A statement of the results of an investigation or of any matter on which definite information is required.

(Oxford English Dictionary)

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## 2 Why write reports?

### Why write reports?

To:

- Develop an argument
- Re-affirm ideas and concepts
- Clarify what we have observed, read and understood
- Assess progress
- Deepen learning
- Strengthen self-expression and communication

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## 3 What makes a “good” report”?

### What makes a good report?

A good report:

- Answers the question in the title
- Draws on relevant reading for its main content
- Shows a good grasp of the ideas studied in the course
- Presents a coherent argument
- Is written in an objective analytical style with appropriate use of evidence
- Is concise and easy to read

## How do we produce a good report?

## How do we produce a good report?

PLANNING is key!

- Think about the essay title
- Gather material
- Note ideas on paper
- Organise material
- Write a first draft
- Review the draft
- Write a final draft

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The essentials of professional report writing

## The essentials of a good report

- Structure
- Content
- Style

## Structure

- Title page
- Acknowledgements
- Contents
- Abstract or summary
- Introduction
- Methodology
- Results or findings
- Discussion
- Conclusion and recommendations
- References
- Appendices

## Content

### Introduction

Terms of reference  
Limits of report  
Outline of method used  
Brief background to subject matter

### Methodology

The form of your enquiry  
The way you collected data

### Discussion

Identification of key issues  
Possible explanations for your findings  
Problems encountered

### Balanced view

## Content

### Conclusions and recommendations

Drawing together of main ideas  
No new information  
Clear and concise recommendations

### References

Complete and accurate list of references

### Appendices

Supporting information

## Style

### Writing style

Use clear and concise language  
Don't use jargon or slang  
Keep sentences short  
Keep paragraphs focussed  
Use active or passive voice –not both  
Check your grammar and spelling!

### Presentation

Type your work with clear font and spacing  
Leave a good margin  
Label each section carefully and consistently  
Make sure headings are clear  
Number all the pages!



## Length

- Stick to what is requested! (e.g. 3000 words)
- Put extra data in appendices
- Do not exceed or shorten total word length by more or less than 10%

## Tables and diagrams

- Place in text at relevant point
- Keep them simple
- Acknowledge sources
- Clearly label figure in text

## Appendices

- Additional information or material referred to in the main report if relevant!
- Appendices should be placed after references/ bibliography and listed in contents page
- Appendices are not included in word count but should not be more than 20% of total word length

## Quotations

- Short quotations can be placed in text using single inverted commas and a statement such as Smith argues ‘quote’
- Long quotations should be placed in a separate paragraph in italics
- All quotations should be followed by a reference in brackets directing the reader to the bibliography at the end of the report e.g. ‘Quote...’ (Smith, 2001, p.75)

## References

- Standard method of acknowledging use of other authors’ materials
- Used for direct quotes or summarising views
- Necessary to avoid plagiarism
- Include a bibliography (or list of references) at end of report
- The Harvard method is recommended for quotations and the bibliography.
- The bibliography is not included in the total word count

## Plagiarism

The substantial or verbatim quotation of work by an unacknowledged author that is consciously presented as the participant's own work.

The large-scale lifting/copying of other people's work from texts, papers, dissertations or other material is a disciplinary offence.

**Don't make assertions without reasoned arguments and corroborative evidence!**

**Reference your sources.**

Be:

- Objective - be logical, reasoned and neutral
- Precise -take care in your choice of words
- Balanced -use evidence in support of arguments

## Addressing specific audiences

### Addressing specific audiences

- Who are your readers?
- Background? Knowledge? Experience? Education/Training?
- Needs and interests?
- What, if anything, sets them apart from other people?
- How familiar are they with your subject?
- Is there more than one audience?