Report Writing

Aim of this factsheet

To provide university students with an overview of how to present an academic report.

Why write reports?

A report is usually an end of module assignment with very clear guidelines from your Tutor. They are usually written to record the methodology, results and conclusions of an investigation. They are used to enable your lecturer to assess the way you have approached your investigation, collected your data and evaluated your results. In business, reports are often used because they are factual and easy to read.

Difference between Essays and Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reports</th>
<th>Essays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headings and sub-headings should be used</td>
<td>No headings (except the title) should be used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullet points or numbers can be used to list points</td>
<td>Continuous sentences should be used – do not use bullets or numbers to list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written to be discussed by more than one person</td>
<td>Written to be read by one person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicated drawings, graphs, statistics and other additional material can be added as appendices</td>
<td>Appendices rarely used as there should be sufficient discussion and explanation within the text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sections of a report

Reports can be written in a variety of ways, there is not just one correct way. This factsheet will provide information on how to write a formal, longer report: but do realise that you can adapt the format to fit your individual investigation.

1. Title page
2. Abstract (not always necessary)
3. Contents
4. Introduction
5. Aims and Objectives
6. Literature Review
7. Research Methodology
8. Ethical Issues
9. Results/Findings
10. Discussion/Analysis
11. Conclusions & Recommendations (if requested)
12. References
13. Appendices
1. The Title Page

This should give the reader a short and clear idea of the topic of the report. The golden rule for titles is be accurate and concise not cryptic. The title page should also include the date the report was written, who wrote the report and who the report was for.

2. Abstract (also known as Summary)

This is a summary of the whole report’s contents. Very often the reader will decide whether to read the whole report based on the abstract and therefore it should be sufficient for the reader to know what the report is all about, including what the investigation has found.

The abstract is written after you have written the rest of the report even though it is presented near the beginning.

The abstract should describe the work that has been carried out, not the work that will be carried out.

3 Contents

A list of contents is needed for all but the shortest of reports.

4. Introduction

This gives the background to the investigation. It puts your investigation into context and gives the reader some idea of the value and importance of your work. It may include a brief review of the relevant literature. If you are including information from readings and texts do not forget to reference the material correctly (see RefZone information on Library webpages).

5. Aims and Objectives.

You should have a clear statement about the purpose of your study (aim) and how you are going to achieve those aims (objectives). State what you are trying to achieve and how you will achieve it. This is a crucial part of the report as it will be judged on whether your aims and objectives have been achieved: ensure you are clear about the difference between these.

6. Literature Review

This informs the reader of the current thinking in your topic. It will place your research in context and show how you are building upon previous knowledge. This should also highlight any areas of contention. Ensure you cite your sources of information and reference your work.

7. Research Methodologies

This section is important because if you undertake an inappropriate methodology your results and findings will be disputed. The reader needs to know what you did to find out information so they can make a judgement about the suitability of your methodology.

In this section, you state what you have done to achieve your aims, what you did to find information you need and why you did it.
The methodology section can be sub-divided into the following sub-sections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Include</th>
<th>What is it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Paradigm</td>
<td>A short section (one or two sentences) in which you make a clear and accurate statement outlining what sort of investigation you used. Justify your statements by referencing to best practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Strategy</td>
<td>You should provide a brief description of who you used in your sample and why. The information should include the critical features of any respondents used.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| (if used)                | • Who were the subjects of the study?  
|                          | • How were they selected?  
|                          | • How many were there?  
|                          | Justify your decisions by referencing back to best practice.                                                                                   |
| Materials/Apparatus      | What sort of materials were used? For example, experimental stimuli, tests, questionnaires, etc. If using established tests/materials, these should be fully referenced. Any apparatus used should be described accurately (you could use diagrams/photographs). |
| (if necessary)           |                                                                                                                                               |
| Procedure                | This should be a description of exactly how you carried out the investigation. This should include what exactly happened during the investigation, from the start to the finish, in enough detail to allow replication. Remember to use the passive voice (third party), past tense. “The questionnaire was given to all 1st year students.” “The responses to each question were recorded using simple tally charts”. The procedure does not have to take the form of an experiment; some reports document the findings of desk based research and extended literature reviews. |
| Method of Analysis       | As your analysis is part of what you did, you should include a statement of what methods of analysis were used and why they were chosen (do not panic if the methodology section becomes long – it is quite normal for this section to sometimes be the longest section of the report). |

8. Ethical Issues

All dissertations/investigations should consider ethical issues, and you are expected to complete a Staffordshire University Ethical Approval form and have this signed off by your tutor. This should be included as an appendix. In your report, you should make the reader aware of the possible ethical issues of your research and how you will overcome these issues, for example: confidentiality, storage of data and so on.
9. **Results/Findings** (sometimes this section can be merged with Discussion and Analysis)

It tells the reader what you have found out and is objective. It states the findings of your research. You may include tables and graphs, but also explain the results in words. Any raw data should be included as an appendix.

10. **Discussion/Analysis**

This covers the interpretations of the results, evaluation of the theoretical significance of the findings and a general discussion of the investigation. It should answer questions such as:

- What has your investigation shown?
- Did it achieve its objectives?
- What theory/literature does it support or contradict?
- What are the most plausible explanations of your findings?
- Are there any possible criticisms of the investigation?

The discussion should also:

- Build on the material in the introduction and literature review
- Evaluate the adequacy of your methodology
- Suggest design features that may have affected the results
- Include whether the results would be different under different conditions

11. **Conclusions & Recommendations**

Use your findings and analysis to draw your conclusions and to support any recommendations you want to make.

You may also make the recommendation that further investigation is undertaken. This is particularly important if you realise that there are gaps in your methodology or anomalies in your findings. Alternatively, you may advise that other actions be considered.

12. **References**

Make sure references are given correctly. See Staffordshire University resources on the Refzone webpage for more information.

13. **Appendices (not usually included in the word count)**

Do not put results here: only the raw data should be presented in an Appendix.

Some other materials may be usefully included in an Appendix (for example, blank questionnaires, copy of written tests used). Remember not to include anything in an appendix that has not been referred to in the text.
**Remember**

This factsheet has covered why reports are important and provided guidance on how they can be structured. However, your faculty may have specific requirements. If so, use the information on this fact sheet and adapt it to ensure a sensible report format is used.

**References and further reading**


---

**For an appointment or further advice:**

- **Click:**  [http://libguides.staffs.ac.uk/AcademicSkills](http://libguides.staffs.ac.uk/AcademicSkills)
- **Call:**  01785 353500
- **Email:**  academicskills@staffs.ac.uk
- **Visit:**  Skills Space, Thompson Library, Stoke / Blackheath Lane, Stafford / Shrewsbury Hospital

**Please note** that any information provided by the team is advisory only. No liability will be attached to the University, its employees or agents for any loss or detriment suffered by a student relying on the advice given.