



Writing a report (general tips)

Introduction

Reports are a common type of assessment at university. This help sheet outlines some features characteristic of reports and other areas for consideration.

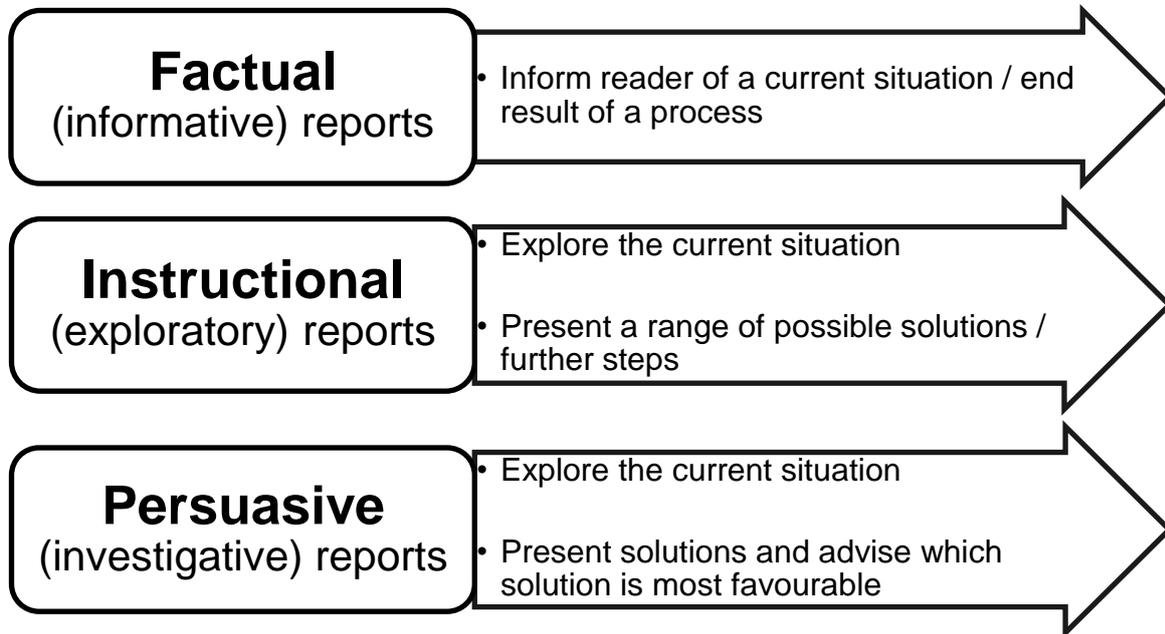
Differences between reports and essays

Reports have specific features that make them different from other assignments. The table below outlines the main differences between reports and essays:

Reports	Essays
Practical, evaluative, analytical	Theoretical / discursive
More formal in structure	Structure less formal
Reader able to extract meaning quickly	Understanding requires careful reading
Focus on facts	Discuss ideas
Style may vary from section to section	Style consistent throughout (narrative)
Contains an abstract / executive summary	Rarely contains an abstract/ executive summary
Table of contents required	Table of contents not necessary
Headings, subheadings and bullet points appropriate	Headings, subheadings and bullet points rarely appropriate
Figures and tables appropriate	Figures and tables rare
Abbreviations more appropriate	Abbreviations less appropriate
Includes recommendations rather than just a conclusion	Includes a conclusion

Types of reports

All reports can be grouped by their purpose, or function, as illustrated below:



Before you start, it is useful to have an idea which of these functions your report fulfils. In some cases, a report may be a mixture of the three categories.

Similarly, depending on the purpose of the report (assignment brief), your report will be:

- ➔ **Scientific** (for example, for subject areas such as biology and psychology)
- ➔ **Non-scientific** (for example, for subject areas such as business)

The structure, formatting style and other aspects will depend on whether it is a scientific or non-scientific report. Your subject, faculty guidelines and the assignment brief should help you determine this.

Planning and writing your report

There are several things to consider before you start writing your report:

Assignment brief

As with any other assignments, the assignment brief is your starting point. Additionally, more information can be given during the relevant lecture or tutorial. Use the assignment brief and additional information (if appropriate) to make a draft plan before you move on with your research. It is useful to refer to the brief throughout the writing process in order to stay focussed.

Your audience

'Real life' reports have clear purpose. Similarly, you may be asked to write your academic report with a specific audience in mind. For example, a business student can be writing a report for a potential investor. Knowing who your report is aimed at will affect the focus of your writing and help make it more specific.

Source quality and referencing

Although a report is different from an essay, it is still a piece of academic work. Make sure your sources of information are of high quality as, peer reviewed journals, books, official websites). Similarly, your referencing should be in line with the university guidelines.

Format and style

As reports are all about presenting data in the structured, clear and easy-to-understand way, using appropriate format and style can help. Your course and assignment guide should be your first point of reference on the matter. This said, it is

more acceptable to use tables, figures and charts to illustrate the points you are making.

Breaking the text into sections and subsections will also help to keep it structured and easy to navigate.

Sections

All reports will contain main sections that are about specific areas. Each main section should have an appropriate title and typically will be numbered: 1, 2, 3, etc.

Within each section there will normally be a number of first level subsections. These provide details about a specific aspect of a main section. Each first level subsection should have an appropriate title and typically will be numbered: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, etc.

If you need further level of detail, you may want second level subsections, which are numbered: 1.1.1, 1.1.2, etc.

Example:

(1) The importing of cars into the UK (main section)

(1.1) Cars imported from Europe (first level subsection)

(1.1.1) Cars imported from Germany (second level subsection)

(1.2) Cars imported from outside of Europe (first level subsection)

(2) The environmental impact of car usage in the UK (main section)

(2.1) Fossil fuels (first level subsection)

(2.1.1) Oil (second level subsection)

(2.2) Alternative energy (a first level subsection)

(2.2.1) Hydrogen (second level subsection)

(2.2.2) Solar power (second level subsection)

Proofreading

Reports are widely used in the professional world. It is therefore very important that they are accurate and well presented. Proofreading improves the quality and the presentation of your work.

Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit: lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub



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