



Writing a non-scientific report

Introduction

You may be asked to write a report that covers a case study or a group project. This will most likely be a “non-scientific” report. This help sheet highlights some key issues to consider when writing your report.

Report structure

There is no one “right” way to structure a report because variation exists between different types of report. Overall, the structure of a report is similar to academic articles with some small additions; reports generally include the following elements:

- Title page
- (Executive) summary – effectively an abstract
- Contents page
- Introduction
- Main body – formed of sections with headings
- Conclusion
- Reference list or bibliography – One not both

This list is not exclusive. Reports may also include other sections, such as:

- Acknowledgements
- Recommendations
- Appendices

As reports vary, check your own department’s guidelines on structuring your report. The following table details key points in relation to the basic structure of a non-scientific report.

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| <p>Title page</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ On a separate page (must follow faculty guidelines) ✓ Typically includes report title, student ID number and the unit code, sometimes they include your name ✓ May require word count |
| <p>Acknowledgements</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Is kept brief (as this section is not marked) |
| <p>Summary/ Executive summary</p> | <p>A short summary (usually around 100 – 150 words), which briefly states:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Topic being studied ✓ Rationale (why the topic is worth study) ✓ Key frameworks / models used ✓ Key sources of information ✓ General findings / result of the report ✓ Outline of recommendations |
| <p>Contents page</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ More typical of longer reports (check your assignment brief) ✓ Lists sections and subsections with page numbers – including appendices (if included) ✓ May include a separate list of graphs, figures and tables (including their labels and page numbers) |

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| <p>Introduction</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ “Sets the scene” for your reader ✓ Introduces previous relevant literature ✓ Outlines any theory, model or framework you use in your report ✓ Provides a rationale (why the investigation was undertaken / the value gained by undertaking it) ✓ Details the research questions / aims / objectives ✓ Some people prefer to write this after the main body or revise once the whole report is written ✓ Should be written or revised after completion of your dissertation |
| <p>Main Body</p> | <p>Note: This section has the most variance as the contents depend on the subject you are studying, and the purpose of the assignment, but generally this section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Is divided into sections complete with headings, and further divided using subheadings where appropriate. This division should be made based on a logical development of an argument or point, and will help your writing “flow” ✓ Includes explanation, analysis, application and justification (depending on your level of study) of any theory, model or framework used |
| <p>Conclusion</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provides a summary of the topics covered in the preceding sections ✓ Guides the reader towards a course of action (if recommendations are included) or single viewpoint (if not) ✓ Does not introduce new information |

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| Recommendations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Are clearly derived from the discussion in the main body ✓ Are realistic and achievable for the subject matter ✓ Should cover the impact of implementation (i.e. how does your recommendation change others' practice?) |
| Reference list and bibliography | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Follows your assignment / faculty guidelines / conventions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference list = all references you used in text • Bibliography = all references in text + any additional reading that is not featured in the main text |
| Appendices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Appropriate but not necessary ✓ Include supporting material (for example, a table of results used in your research) ✓ Referred to in the relevant parts of text in the report ✓ Clearly labelled and logically compiled ✓ Named on the contents page |

Please note

Not all reports follow this exact format and the information in this guide should only be treated as a basic guide. Always follow the assignment guidelines in your unit handbook.

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

