# Report Writing

**Objectives**: By the end of the lesson students should be able to identify the different parts of a report & use them effectively to write a report.

When we think of reports, we often visualize a long bound document with hundreds of pages. This in fact could be one form of report while the report could also be a single paged document, or it could even be an e-mail. The structure of the report however is determined by its content and the needs of its readers.

While the following structure is not the only one, it is a popular one and contains all the features that would be expected in a fairly lengthy report. Those is bold type should appear in all reports.

**(1) Content list**

**(2) Executive Summary**

**(3) Introduction**

**(4) Body of the report**

**(5) Conclusion**

**(6) Recommendations**

**(7) Appendices**

**(8) Bibliography**

The examples for the different parts of the reports is taken form the real-life reports.

If the report is any more than a few pages long it needs a content list detailing the main sections and the pages on which they appear.

**Contents list**:

## Executive Summary

The readers of a report are usually busy people. They haven't got time to wade through page after page of text just to find out which parts of a report may be of value to them – if any. The purpose of the executive summary is to set out the substance of the report briefly in such a way that busy readers can see at a glance whether the report is relevant to them and, if so, which aspects of it are of most interest. Ideally it should not exceed one side of A4. Executive summaries that run into several pages are self defeating.

> The study was conducted to identify business needs for languages and the methods by which companies resourced such needs. The study was based on a survey of nearly 2000 companies and case studies of 14 companies. Field work took place between March and June 19991.
>
> Language Needs
>
> The study showed extensive language needs amongst business:
>
> • Over 60 of companies conducted business with foreigners whose first language was not English.
>
> • Language needs were highly concentrated in a few areas: Predominantly French and German spoken countries, followed by Spanish and Italian: these were the countries where both business was most often conducted.

## Introduction

This should contain the following information.

- **The origins of the report**

  The background and events leading to the need for the report.

- **Its terms of reference**

  The scope (and limitations) of the report and its purpose.

- **How it was conducted and by who.**

  This can also include acknowledgements of help received.

- **Other introductory information.**

  It is important to think of the readers of the report and to include at this point any other background information they will need in order to understand the material in the body of the report.

**Introduction**

Banks and building societies have been characterized by stable, regulated internal labour markets. However, internal labour markets have been subjected to changes following deregulation in the 1980s, diversification of financial products, and increased use of technology.

It is perceived that theses events, together with a tendency towards flatter organization structures, have greatly changed the nature of employment in banks and building societies.

The purpose of this study of (client name) has been to discover the extent to which that organization conforms to the model which has been traditionally associated with employment in banking. This traditional …

**Body of the**

**The main part of the report contains:**

- a detailed account of what your research discovered
- the conclusion that you draw from it
- references to sources you have quoted. The sources should be listed in the bibliography, and the references should follow a standard pattern

A report of any length will be divided into a number of main sections, each on a separate topic or theme. These in turn will probably be subdivided into sections. All sections and subsections will need headings and, to avoid confusion, it is very desirable to use a numbering system. A commonly used one is decimal: the first main section is numbered 1: subsections are then numbered 1.1, 1.2, etc, and their subsections become 1.1.1, 1.1.1.2, and so on.

**5.12** Some companies expect their future senior mangers to have as wide a range of jobs experiences as possible. Others put more weight on an individuals proven track record.—— 's senior man-

**5.13** Nonetheless, most companies are grappling with the problem of fast – stream staff moving out of jobs too quickly. This issue was raised in the interviews with – and - where the

The body of the report will consist of the details of the research often in the form of tables, charts, and figures, with relevant quotations.

**Occupational Pattern of Training**

Where training was provided for employees with a business need, training was most often provided for managers, 89 per cent, and least often for secretaries, receptionists and telephonists, less than 60 per cent, Table 7.2.1. This pattern matches the pattern of jobs which companies identified needing languages, see chapter 4. . Where training was less directed at business needs, the case study evidence suggested that training was likely to be available for staff in all types of jobs.

**Table: 7: 2:1:** Training Provision for those with a Business Need

| | Percentage of Companies Providing Training |
|---|---|
| Managers | 89 |
| Professional | 78 |
| Technical | 71 |
| Sales / Purchasing Staff | 71 |
| Secretarial | 58 |
| Receptionists / Telephonists | 57 |

N = 226

**The arguments may be presented in a continuous prose, and / or a series of bullet points.**

**Training Providers**

Public sector providers were used by fewer companies than private or in-house. Privately provided training was considered better on grounds of quality, standard, tailoring to business use, range, and availability when needed. Public sector provided training fared badly on two counts: its tailoring to business use and its availability when needed. However, where the public sector provided company in-house courses, these criticisms disappeared.

Cultural Training

Apart form the cultural and business training included in many language courses, the extent of the cultural training appeared to be low.

Encouraging Language Acquisition

Companies encouraged language learning in a number of ways

- employees had to learn language to conduct their job:
- through career enhancement:
- by easy access and subsidized (usually free) access to training:
- by making language acquisition more fun or challenging, encouraging through encouraging trainees to sit exams.

Financial incentives, other than the above, were rare.

If the material you are handling are detailed, there's a danger that the main thrust of your argument will become obscured by details. In such situations it is better to place highly detailed material in the appendices and to refer to it in the body of the report in numbered notes. While the reference number appears at the relevant point in the text, the note itself can either be placed at the foot of the page or at the end of the section or chapter. If there are not too many notes, it is better to put them at the bottom of the page, since it is irritating for the reader to have to keep turning pages to find the relevant notes. If there are a lot of notes, however, they are better placed at the end the chapter, since to place them at the foot of the page will make the pages look messy and unbalanced.

It is essential that when published or unpublished textual sources are referred to, they are clearly identified and readers are enabled – should they so wish – to check the original. In the case of books, the following information should be given:

- the name(s) of the author(s)
- the full title
- the name of the publisher
- the year of first publication and place of publication or, if it is a subsequent edition, the number of the edition and the date of its publication

a common style for doing this is:

**Seely, J. (1998): <u>The Oxford Guide to Writing and Speaking</u> Oxford: Oxford University Press**

This information should appear in the bibliography at the end of the report. References to the book in the text should simply use the author's name and date followed by the page(s) referred to:

Seely (1998), pp. 34-5

References to periodicals and journals should appear in the bibliography in this style:

Haywood, K.T. (1997): Teaching mental arithmetic to 11-year-olds' Modern Maths Quarterly 15, pp.34-7

## Conclusion

Each section of the report should lead to a number of conclusions. At the end of the section these are spelled out and the reasoning behind them explained. If there is a separate conclusions section these conclusions are pulled out and presented as an ordered sequence.

> The findings show that [client name] does not confirm the model of the flexible firm. If the managerial group constitutes an internal labour market and the non-managerial group does not because it is peripheral, we should expect to see differences in the following characteristics: entry points, attachment to the organization, and career development of the two groups.
>
> As far as entry points are concerned our figures so far fail to indicate any

**Recommendations**

Not all reports present recommendations; some are merely acquired to present a set of information based on research. Where there are recommendations, these may be presented as part of the report's conclusions, or in a separate sections which may be placed towards the end of the report, after the conclusions, or immediately after the executive summary. Indeed, some writers prefer to make their recommendations part of the executive summary, since they are an important part of what the busy reader wants to know first.

**Appendices**

The value of placing certain lengthy detailed information in a series of appendices (some times called annex) has already been mentioned. The type of information that may go in appendices includes:

- a detailed description of the research method, including the questionnaire(s) used and how the sample was selected
- the research brief and the members of the team producing the report
- detailed research data
- case studies

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## Guidelines

**Preparation**

1. Begin by defining clearly your objectives (s) and your readership.
2. Plan your research, begin by making two lists:
   - Questions you want to ask
   - The people and places where you can expect to find an answer (or where you can get advice on relevant sources of information)
3. Use your lists to help you schedule your research.

**Writing the report**

The main items a report can contain are:

4. **A table of contents**.

5. **An executive summary.** Use this to state clearly and concisely what the report is about and what it discovered. You may also wish to include your principal recommendations here. (But see 9, below)

6. **An introduction.** Use this to explain the history of the commissioning of the report, its terms of reference, how its was conducted, and any other important background information.

7. **The body of the report.** Here you should set out the main information which your research uncovered and the conclusion that you draw from it. If the material is dense and / or detailed, you may prefer to place the detail in one or more appendices and refer to it through footnotes.

8. **The conclusion.** It is often a good idea to repeat the conclusions you reached again in a separate section, referring back to relevant sections of the report as necessary.

9. **The recommendations.** You can list these separately after the conclusions, or place them in or after the executive summary.

10. Appendices. Use these for material such as detailed research data, a description of the research methodology, and case studies.

11. **Bibliography.** This should contain details of all published and unpublished texts quoted or referred to, following one of the conventional styles.