Report writing checklist

1. Title page
   Does this include the:
   • title?
   • author’s name?
   • module/course details?

2. Acknowledgements
   Have you acknowledged all sources of help?

3. Contents
   Have you listed all the main sections in sequence?
   Have you included a list of illustrations?

4. Abstract or summary
   Does this state:
   • the main task?
   • the methods used?
   • the conclusions reached?
   • the recommendations made?

5. Introduction
   Does this include:
   • your terms of reference?
   • the limits of the report?
   • an outline of the method?
   • a brief background to the subject matter?

6. Methodology
   Does this include:
   • the form your enquiry took?
   • the way you collected your data?

7. Results and findings
   Are your diagrams clear and simple?
   Are they clearly labelled?
   Do they relate closely to the text?

8. Discussion
   Have you identified key issues?
   Have you suggested explanations for your findings?
   Have you outlined any problems encountered?
   Have you presented a balanced view?

9. Conclusions and recommendations
   Have you drawn together all of your main ideas?
   Have you avoided including any new information?
   Are your recommendations clear and concise?

10. References
    Have you listed all your sources?
    Have you presented all the necessary information you are using to support your reference?
    Are your references accurate and consistent?

11. Appendices
    Have you only included supporting information?
    Does the reader need to read these sections?

12. Writing style
    Have you used clear and concise language?
    Are your sentences short and jargon free?
    Are your paragraphs tightly focused?
    Have you used the active or the passive voice?

REPORT WRITING

What is a report?

A report is a more highly structured form of writing than, say, an essay, and is designed so that it can be read quickly and accurately; though reports are not necessarily read from beginning to end. Structure and convention in written reports stress the process by which the information was gathered as much as the information itself. Reports should be organised for the convenience of the intended reader. Reports are written on a wide range of subjects for a wide variety of reasons.

Before writing any report you should identify the objective and the preferred conventions of structure and presentation. This is as true for reports you write at university as it is for reports written in employment. All reports attempt to communicate findings for one reason or another, whether to inform decision makers, change public opinion or maintain a record of development. Whenever you write a report you must bear in mind why you are writing and who you are writing for. All reports have an intended reader. Put yourself in his/her position. What does he/she need to know?

This study advice sheet highlights common features in written reports and makes recommendations for clear presentation and adherence to convention.

Stages in report writing

The following stages are involved in writing a report:
- planning your work;
- collecting your information;
- organising and structuring your information;
- writing the first draft;
- checking and re-drafting.

Draw up an outline structure for your report and set the work within a sensible time scale for completion by the given deadline. One common structure is based on the 4 P’s: position, problem, possibilities, proposal. This means you outline the current position, describe the problem, examine the range of possibilities and decide on a proposal (Hemingway, 1993). Some of the most time-consuming parts of the process are collecting and selecting your information, and checking and revising your report.

- Clarify your terms of reference – what brief are you working to?
- Decide on the main sections of your report – what instructions have you been given?

Structuring your report

Check with your tutor to find out what your report should include and how it should be presented. The following elements are however common to many reports:
- title page,
- acknowledgements,
- contents,
- abstract or summary,
- introduction,
- methodology,
- results or findings,
- discussion,
- conclusion and recommendations,
- references,
- appendices.