

The **Conclusions...** should be a short section with no new arguments or evidence. Sum up the main points of your research. How do they answer the original brief for the work reported on? This section may also include:

- Recommendations for action
- Suggestions for further research

The **Reference List/Bibliography...** list full details for any works you have referred to in the report. For the correct style of referencing to use, check any instructions you may have been given.

If you are uncertain about how or when to reference, see our **Effective Study Guides on Referencing**, available in paper or online at www.rdg.ac.uk/studyskills/study_resources/referencing.htm.

The **Appendices...** include any additional information that may help the reader but is not essential to the report's main findings; for instance, interview questions, raw data, or a glossary of terms used. Label all appendices and refer to them where appropriate in the main text (e.g. 'See Appendix A for an example questionnaire').

For more information, see....

Report writing 1. Features of good reports.

Report writing 3. Writing your report.

www.learnhigher.ac.uk/learningareas/reportwriting/betterreportwriting.htm

For more on this and other aspects of academic study, see our website at www.rdg.ac.uk/studyadvice

© Dr Kim Shahabudin, Dr Angela Taylor, Dr Judy Turner & Dr Michelle Reid. University Study Advice team & LearnHigher CETL (Reading), 2008.



Structuring your report



Report writing 2

This guide is the second of three on report writing at university. It includes advice on:

- The most commonly-found sections of a report
- The function of each section, and how to decide where your information will go

Structuring your report

Unlike essays, reports have formal structures. When writing an essay, you need to place your information **to make a strong argument**. When writing a report, you need to place your information **in the appropriate section**. Consider the role each item will play in communicating information or ideas to the reader, and place it in the section where it will best perform that role. For instance:

- Does it provide background to your research? (Introduction or Literature Review)
- Does it describe the types of activity you used to collect evidence? (Methods)
- Does it present factual data? (Results)
- Does it place evidence in the context of background? (Discussion)
- Does it make recommendations for action? (Conclusion)

Top tip...

Reports for different briefs will require different sections to be included. Check your brief carefully for the sections to include in your final report.

The **Abstract/Executive summary...** is the ‘shop window’ for your report. It is the first (and sometimes the only) section to be read and should be the last to be written. It should enable the reader to make an informed decision about whether they want to read the report itself. Length depends on the extent of the work reported - usually a paragraph or two and always less than a page. It should briefly explain:

- the purpose of the work
- methods used for research
- main conclusions reached
- any recommendations



The **Introduction...** should explain the rationale for undertaking the work reported on, and the way you decided to do it. Include what you have been asked (or chosen) to do and the reasons for doing it.

- State what the report is about. What is the question you are trying to answer? If it is a brief for a specific reader (e.g. a feasibility report on a construction project for a client), say who they are.
- Describe your starting point and the background to the subject: e.g., what research has already been done (if you have to include a Literature Review, this will only be a brief survey); what are the relevant themes and issues; why are you being asked to investigate it now?
- Explain how you are going to go about responding to the brief. If you are going to test a hypothesis in your research, include this at the end of your introduction. Include a brief outline of your method of enquiry. State the limits of your research and reasons for them, e.g.

“Research will focus on native English speakers only, as a proper consideration of the issues arising from speaking English as a second language is beyond the scope of this project”.

The **Literature Review...** surveys publications (books, journals and sometimes conference papers) on work that has already been done on the topic of your report. It should only include studies that have direct relevance to your research.

Introduce your review by explaining how you went about finding your materials, and any clear trends in research that have emerged. Group your texts in themes. Write about each theme as a separate section, giving a critical summary of each piece of work, and showing its relevance to your research. Conclude with how the review has informed your research (things you’ll be building on, gaps you’ll be filling etc).

The **Methods...** should be written in such a way that a reader could replicate the research you have done. State clearly how you carried out your investigation. Explain why you chose this particular method (questionnaires, focus group, experimental procedure etc). Include techniques and any equipment you used. If there were participants in your research, who were they? How many? How were they selected?

Write this section **concisely** but **thoroughly** – Go through what you did step by step, including everything that is relevant. You know what you did, but could a reader follow your description?

The **Results/Data/Findings...** this section has only one job, which is to present the findings of your research as simply as possible. Use the format that will achieve this most effectively: e.g. text, graphs, tables or diagrams. Don’t repeat the same information in two visual formats (e.g. a graph and a table).

Label your graphs and tables clearly. Give each figure a title and describe in words what the figure demonstrates. Save your interpretation of the results for the Discussion section. For help with statistical analysis, try the Maths Support Centre www.reading.ac.uk/mathssupport/ or the Statistical Advisory Service www.reading.ac.uk/stats-advisory.

The **Discussion...** is probably the longest section. It brings everything together, showing how your findings respond to the brief you explained in your introduction and the previous research you surveyed in your literature review. This is the place to mention if there were any problems (e.g. your results were different from expectations, you couldn’t find important data, or you had to change your method or participants) and how they were or could have been solved.