

Writing a research report

A research report can be based on practical work, research by reading or a study of an organisation or industrial/workplace situation.

1. Preparing

Identify the **purpose**/the aims of the research/research question.

Identify the **audience**.– lecturer/supervisor/company/organization management/staff. The amount of background included will vary depending on the knowledge of the “audience”.

2. Collecting and organising information

There are two main sources of information depending on the research task:

1. Reading — theory and other research
2. Research — experiments, data collection - questionnaires, surveys, observation, interviews.

Organise and collate the information in a logical order. Make sure you record the bibliographic information of your reading as you go along.

See Quick Tips on mind mapping techniques.

3. Planning

Before writing the report, prepare a detailed plan in outline form.

Consider the following:

Logical organisation

Information in a report must be organized logically. Communicate the main ideas followed by supporting details and examples. Start with the more important or significant information and move on to the least important information.

Headings

Use headings and suitable sub headings to clearly show the different sections. In longer reports the sections should be numbered.

4. Writing the report

1. Draft the report from your detailed plan.
2. Do not worry too much about the final form and language, but rather on presenting the ideas coherently and logically.
3. Redraft and edit. Check that sections contain the required information and use suitable headings, check ideas flow in a logical order and remove any unnecessary information.
4. Write in an academic style and tone.
 - Use a formal objective style.
 - Generally avoid personal pronouns; however, some reports based on your own field experience or work placement can be reflective the first person can be used. For example, “I observed..”. If in doubt about this, check with the lecturer.

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Sections of a research report

The table below summarises the general headings often used in research or laboratory reports. Check with your lecturer on the headings required for your assignments.

NB Further headings and sub-headings are content based and are particular to the individual report.

Section	Purpose
Title page	Title of report Student name/student number Course/subject Date due
Table of contents	Shows the sections of the report
Executive summary or Abstract	Gives a summary of the whole report Outlines -purpose, research method, findings, main conclusions and recommendations Mainly past tense Written last
Introduction	Outlines context, background and purpose Defines terms and sets limits of the research The reader/audience can easily identify what, how, why (Mainly uses past tense and can be written later although presented first)
Methodology	Explains how research was done and outlines how the data was collected
Results/Findings may be combined	Presents findings of the research Facts only - no interpretation Uses graphic form (eg. tables & graphs)
Discussion ↓	Presents an interpretation and evaluation of the results. Analyses results - draws together different aspects of the findings, findings of other studies and refers to literature
Conclusion may be combined	Brief statement of what was found
Recommendations	Suggest suitable changes/solutions
Appendix ↓	Attachments of additional information (eg. surveys, questionnaires, glossary etc)
References	All references used