Checklist for good reports

✓ Does it answer the purpose stated (or implied) in the brief?

✓ Does it answer the needs of the projected reader?

✓ Has the material been placed in the appropriate sections?

✓ Has all the material been checked for accuracy?

✓ Are graphs and tables carefully labelled?

✓ Is data in graphs or tables also explained in words and analysed?

✓ Does the discussion/conclusion show how the results relate to objectives set out in the introduction?

✓ Has all irrelevant material been removed?

✓ Is it written throughout in appropriate style (i.e. no colloquialisms or contractions, using an objective tone, specific rather than vague)?

✓ Is it jargon-free and clearly written?

✓ Has every idea taken from or inspired by someone else's work been acknowledged with a reference?

✓ Have all illustrations and figures taken from someone else's work been cited correctly?

✓ Has it been carefully proof-read to eliminate careless mistakes?

For more advice, see....

Report writing 2. Structuring your report.

Report writing 3. Writing your report.

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

Features of good reports

Report writing 1

This guide is the first of three looking at report writing. It includes:

- What a report is
- What makes a good report
- How reports are read

What is a report?

A report is a piece of informative writing that describes a set of actions and analyses any results in response to a specific brief. A quick definition might be: "This is what I did and this is what it means." You may be given an assignment which is not called a report but shares many of the same features; if so, aspects of this guide will be helpful.

Here are some key differences between reports and essays.

Essays	Reports
Argumentative and idea-based	Informative and fact-based
Semi-structured	Formally structured
Not written with a specific reader in mind (except the marker)	Usually written with a specific purpose and reader in mind
Written in single narrative style throughout	Written in style appropriate to each section
Usually do not include sub-headings	Always include section headings
Usually do not include bullet points	Often use bullet points
Usually no tables or graphs	Often includes tables or graphs
Offer conclusions about question	Offer recommendations for action

What makes a good/bad report?

Here are some of the most common complaints about reports:

- ✗ Badly structured
- ✗ Inappropriate writing style
- ✗ Incorrect or inadequate referencing
- ✗ Doesn't answer the brief
- ✗ Too much/too little/irrelevant material
- ✗ Expression not clear
- ✗ Doesn't relate results to purpose
- ✗ Unnecessary use of jargon

How can you make sure your report does what it's meant to do, and does it well?

> **Top tip...**
>
> The most important thing to do is **read the brief** (or the title of your assignment, or your research question) **carefully**. Then read it again even more carefully! If you're still not completely clear about what to do, speak to your tutor or a Study Adviser – don't guess.

- Make sure you know which sections your report should have and what should go in each. Reports for different disciplines and briefs will require different sections: for instance, a business report may need a separate Recommendations section but no Methods section. Check your brief carefully to make sure you have the correct sections. See **Report writing 2: Structuring your report** to learn more about what goes where.

- Remember that reports are meant to be informative: to tell the reader what was done, what was discovered as a consequence and how this relates to the reasons the report was undertaken. Include only relevant material in your background and discussion.

- A report is an act of communication between you and your reader. So pay special attention to who your projected reader is, and what

they want from the report. Sometimes you will be asked to write for an imaginary reader (e.g. a business client). In this case it's vital to think about why they want the report to be produced (e.g. to decide on the viability of a project) and to make sure you respond to that. If it's your tutor, they will want to know that you can communicate the processes and results of your research clearly and accurately, and can discuss your findings in the context of the overall purpose.

- Write simply and appropriately. See **Report writing 3. Writing your report** for more on this.

- Your method and findings should be described accurately and in non-ambiguous terms. A perfectly described method section would make it possible for someone else to replicate your research process and achieve the same results.

- Spend time on your discussion section. This is the bit that pulls the whole piece together by showing how your findings relate to the purpose of the report, and to any previous research.

- Every idea and piece of information you use that comes from someone else's work **must** be acknowledged with a reference. Check your brief, or department handbook for the form of referencing required (usually a short reference in the body of the text, and a full reference in the Reference List at the end).

- The word count will tell you what the scope of the report is. A 5000 word report will be expected to include a lot more background and discussion than a 1000 word report, which will be looking for more conciseness in the way you convey your information.

How are reports read?

Research on how managers read reports discovered that they were most likely to read (in order): the abstract or summary; then the introduction; then the conclusions; then the findings; then the appendices.

This is not to suggest that you should spend less time on writing up your findings. But it does show that the sections you may think of as less important (like the abstract or introduction) are actually often the places a reader gets their first impressions. So it's worth getting them right.