

Writing a Research Report

Writing Centre Learning Guide

As a university student you may be required to write a variety of reports for assessment purposes. A research report is one type that is often used in the sciences, engineering and psychology. Here your aim is to write clearly and concisely about your research topic so that the reader can easily understand the purpose and results of your research.

Structure

You must carefully read your course information details to ensure that you comply with what the lecturer/tutor stipulates. A report is typically made up of three main divisions: (1) preliminary material, (2) body and (3) supplementary material. Each of the sections contains a different kind of content. Refer to the tables below:

Table 1: Divisions and sections of a report

Broad Divisions	Individual Sections
(1) Preliminary material	Title of Report
	Table of Contents (not always required)
	Abstract/Synopsis
(2) Body of report	Introduction
	Literature Review (sometimes included in the Introduction)
	Methodology
	Results
	Discussion
	Conclusion Recommendations (sometimes included in the Conclusion)
(3) Supplementary material	References or Bibliography
	Appendices

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Table 2: Content of individual sections

Individual Sections	Content of Each Section
Title of Report	Concise heading indicating what the report is about
Table of Contents (not always required)	List of major sections and headings with page numbers
Abstract/Synopsis	Concise summary of main findings
Introduction	What you researched and why
Literature Review (sometimes included in the Introduction)	Other relevant research in this area
Methodology	What you did and how you did it
Results	What you found
Discussion	Relevance of your results, how it fits with other research in the area
Conclusion	Summary of results/findings
Recommendations (sometimes included in the Conclusion)	What needs to be done as a result of your findings
References or Bibliography	All references used in your report or referred to for background information
Appendices	Any additional material which will add to your report

STEP 1

Analyse the Task

As with any assignment task, you must first analyse what is expected of you. This involves careful reading of the assignment task as outlined in your course information book. You may find the following questions useful when analysing the task:

- What is the purpose of the report?
(It could be analysing, persuading or reporting on an investigation.)
- Who is the audience for the report?
- What is the word limit?
(Many times the word limit only includes the body of the report.)
- What is the topic of the report?
(The topic may be specified by the lecturer, but other times you will have a choice.)
- What is the expected format of the report?

STEP 2

Develop a Rough Plan

Use the section headings (outlined above) to assist with your rough plan. Write a thesis statement that clarifies the overall purpose of your report. Jot down anything you already know about the topic in the relevant sections.

STEP 3

Do the Research

Steps 1 and 2 will guide your research for this report. You may need to report on other research on a particular topic or do some research of your own. Keep referring to your analysis and rough plan while you are doing your research to ensure that you remain on track.

Give yourself plenty of time for this step, as the research phase of your work will usually take the most time of any step in producing your report. Also, ensure you keep correct bibliographic details for all of the material you may later use in your report.

STEP 4

Draft the Body of Your Report

- **Introduction** - The purpose of your report. The thesis statement will be useful here. Background information may include a brief review of the literature already available on the topic so that you are able to 'place' your research in the field. Some brief details of your methods and an outline of the structure of the report.
- **Literature Review** - If asked to do a separate literature review, you must carefully structure your findings. It may be useful to do a chronological format where you discuss from the earliest to the latest research, placing your research appropriately in the chronology. Alternately, you could write in a thematic way, outlining the various themes that you discovered in the research regarding the topic. Again, you will need to state where *your* research fits.
- **Methodology** - Here you clearly outline what methodology you used in your research i.e. what you did and how you did it. It must be clearly written so that it would be easy for another researcher to duplicate your research if they wished to.
 - It is usually written in a 'passive' voice (e.g. the participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire attached in Appendix 1) rather than an 'active' voice (e.g. I asked the participants to fill in the questionnaire attached in Appendix 1).
 - Clearly reference any material you have used from other sources. Clearly label and number any diagrams, charts, and graphs. Ensure that they are relevant to the research and add substance to the text rather than just duplicating what you have said. You do not include or discuss the results here.
- **Results** - This is where you indicate what you found in your research. You give the results of your research, but do not interpret them.
- **Discussion** - This is where you discuss the relevance of your results and how your findings fit with other research in the area. It will relate back to your literature review and your introductory thesis statement.
- **Conclusion** - This is a summary of the most significant results/findings. You should not include any new material in this section. Sometimes you could indicate some areas where your research has limits or where further research would be useful.
- **Recommendations** - This includes suggestions for what needs to be done as a result of your findings. Recommendations are usually listed in order of priority.

STEP 5

Draft the Supplementary Material

- **References or Bibliography** - This includes all references used in your report or referred to for background information. This must be done using the referencing convention specified by your lecturer/tutor.
- **Appendices** - These should add extra information to the report. If you include appendices they must be referred to in the body of the report and must have a clear purpose for being included. Each appendix must be named and numbered.

STEP 6

Draft the Preliminary Material

- **Title of Report** - Make sure this is clear and indicates exactly what you are researching.
- **Table of Contents** - List all sections, sub headings tables/graphs appendices and give page numbers for each.
- **Abstract/Synopsis** - This gives a very brief overview of the report in a condensed form. For more specific details on how to write this, please refer to the Learning Guide [Writing an Abstract](#).

STEP 7

Polish Your Report

The final step is checking your report to ensure you have followed all of the guidelines as outlined in your course information. For more detail on how to do this well, please refer to the Learning Guide [Editing Your Own Work](#).