

THE REPORT

Reports are used to present an in-depth study of a particular problem or issue so that important decisions can be made. A long report is always formal in tone. Long reports also tend to follow the same format:

- **Title Page**
- **Executive Summary/Abstract**
- **Table of Contents**
- **Introduction**
- **Discussion**
- **Conclusion**
- **Recommendations**
- **List of References**
- **Appendix or Appendices**

A report will usually use these section titles as headings, with additional sub-headings suitable to the topics being presented and analyzed. Reports are organized with these sections because of the way reports are read by their various readers. Busy executives will likely only have time to read the *Executive Summary/Abstract*, the *Conclusions*, and the *Recommendations*. Colleagues might carefully read the whole report to evaluate the validity of its data and the strength of its arguments. Other professionals in the field might also read the entire report as research for their own reports on similar subjects.

Title Page

- Report title
- Name of the person or organization for whom the report was written
- Name of the person who wrote the report (optional)
- Name of the person and/or organization issuing the report
- Date that the report is issued

Executive Summary/Abstract

In most work situations, this section is called the *Executive Summary*, but scientific and academic communities call it the *Abstract*. It has two purposes: to persuade readers to read the entire report and to provide a summary of the entire report for busy readers. As you can't summarize the entire report until it has been written, the executive summary is written last, although it will be read first by the audience. As it is an overview, the summary needs to be brief, usually only one paragraph and certainly never more than three paragraphs. Yet, it must be clear, engaging and cover all the key ideas of the report.

- Define the purpose of the study or project.
- Present the key ideas and information.
- State the result or outcome.
- Make suggestions for further action.

Table of Contents

The table of contents shows readers the scope of the report and how the information has been organized. It also helps readers find specific sections by their page number. The entries in the table of contents should be the same as the headings in your report.

Introduction

- Purpose: the focus of the study or project and the reasons why it needed to be done.
- Background: the circumstances that led to the study, situation, events or project that is the subject of the report, with possible references to previous reports or studies on the same subject.
- Scope: the extent and perimeters of the study or project.

Discussion

- Outline of your approach and methodology
- Results (what you discovered or did)
- Analysis of results

In the discussion, you will be analyzing the results to discover patterns that indicate trends or connections. In the conclusion, you will be analyzing these patterns and drawing conclusions about what the patterns mean. In a very long report, the results are their own section, with a discussion section following.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, the patterns of the results are analyzed for their meaning or significance. This might require the repetition of information and ideas from the discussion. The conclusion should not present new information, only new ideas based on the information already presented. The conclusion should not introduce suggestions for further action either as this will be done in the recommendations section.

Recommendations

In the conclusions, you determined the meaning of the results. In the recommendations, you suggest what action should be taken based on this meaning. Your suggestions should logically follow from the discussion and conclusions. If your report is purely informational, then you will not include a recommendations section.

List of References

This section identifies the sources that provided information or ideas for your study. Sources that should be listed may include newspaper or magazine articles, websites, government or organization records, books, correspondence, speeches, and interviews. There are a number of different systems for documenting references: MLA (Modern Language Association), APA (American Psychology Association), CM (Chicago Manual), and CP (Canadian Press). MLA and CM are more commonly used in business, APA in science and technology, and CM in public or press documents.

Appendix or Appendices

An appendix is a document attached to your report to provide additional information. *Appendices* is the plural of *appendix*. Each attached document should be its own appendix, with the exception of a series of documents such as monthly budgets for your project or questionnaire forms used in your study. Documents that might be attached to your report include detailed test results or calculations, graphs or charts, drawings or photographs, and catalogues or brochures.