



The Institute

Training and education for Guernsey's Health & Social Services

Study Skills Series

ACADEMIC REPORT WRITING



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Why write academic reports?

Some academic courses require students to present their ideas as a report as opposed to the usual essay format. Report writing is a useful skill to possess in that this form of communicating information and ideas is commonly used in all industries. Academic report writing will help you develop these skills in a disciplined way, enabling you to write reports to a high standard.

How does it differ in style from an essay?

A report differs from an essay in the following way:

- 1) You are permitted to use headings, subheadings and bullet points.
- 2) You can use figures, graphs and tables to present data and images.
- 3) The writing style is usually more succinct and factual and is always written in the third person.

The structure of reports can differ depending on their purpose ie a research report will differ from that relating to a service improvement. However, there are a number of key principles that need to be followed to ensure that your report has impact, whatever the message it is trying to portray.

Where to start.....!

Preparing to write a report is similar to preparing to write an essay. Please refer to the Institutes principles of essay writing, this will provide guidance on how to go about gathering the information you need to write the report. The process of ensuring you meet the requirements for the assignment task, searching the literature and narrowing your focus is the same regardless of whether you are writing an essay or a report. Having identified the main content of your report, you are now in a position to start planning the structure. A report is usually structured as follows:

Title page — usually contains the title of the report, submission date, word count and ID number (your name may be required in some cases).

Acknowledgements — a paragraph thanking those who helped you.

Contents page — should list report headings and the page where they feature

Executive summary — Should contain an overview of the content of the report with key recommendations

1. Introduction - this section should include the

1.1 purpose of the report,

1.2 background information which sets the context of the report

1.3 definitions of key terms used throughout the report

Main body - this is the main element of the report. It will be structured according to the subject matter. However the usual format will be:

- A) A critical analysis of the current situation or problem. It may be useful to use a relevant model or tool from the literature to help you organize your ideas i.e. SWOT analysis or PESTLE, there are others. Remember to think about wider issues which impact on the situation such as policy, national standards and regulation.
- B) A critical review of the literature and other forms of evidence, supporting alternative actions or innovations which could improve the situation. These need to be considered in the light of the quality of the evidence supporting their use, the context within which the proposed changes will be made and the resources (human, material and/or budgetary) required to make change happen.
- C) The main body can be supported with tables, images and figures. These are useful to help illustrate points, demonstrate patterns or make a point in a succinct way. **These are not included in the word count.**

3. Conclusion — this should sum up the key issues raised within the work. This can be bullet pointed if you wish but should not include new material.

4. Recommendations — these should naturally follow your conclusions and be based on the analysis in the main body of work. These should be bullet pointed.

5. References — the sources of the information should be acknowledged as a citation within the report itself and as a full reference in a reference list at the end of the work (see The Institute referencing guidelines).

6. Appendices— these should support and not supplement the report. They should be labeled clearly.

General points.....

- 1) The report structure suggested here may not be the one recommended for the course you are doing, do check with your course lead.
- 2) Observe the way numbering has been used to identify different headings and subheadings in this leaflet. See overleaf under introduction **1 Introduction, 1.1 purpose of the report, 1.2 background, 1.3 definitions**
- 3) Keep sentences short but make sure they make sense. Good grammar, spelling and punctuation is still required.

4) When bullet pointing items make sure you provide an explanatory sentence prior to the bullet point list, for example:-

There are many ways of listing bullet points:

*i) Symbols such as **

ii) Roman numerals as illustrated here

iii) letters of the alphabet a), b)...

iv) Numbers, 1, 2, 3....

v) Dashes such as —

5) Avoid over long paragraphs, keep them short and concise addressing only one topic at a time.

6) Use single line spaces between sentences but double line spaces between paragraphs.

7) Protecting confidentiality of your place of work is difficult especially if you are referring to organisational documents, policies and data. Where you can, you should conceal actual places of work, however it may be permissible to reveal that the report context is situated in the Bailiwick of Guernsey. Please check with the course lead.

8) The word count includes **ALL** the report **EXCEPT** the following:

- Figures and tables
- The reference list
- The appendices

And finally....

It may be tempting, but don't stint on the executive summary! This may be the only part of your report that people will read. It should set out the key messages clearly. Hopefully you will be sharing your report with your colleagues and they may not have the time to read the whole report.

Remember that reports need to be evidence based even if you have read many that aren't. Referenced reports demonstrate that you have based the analysis on the opinions of others who have expertise in the field and not just your own judgement. This will add 'weight' to the argument you are presenting and recommendations you wish to make.

A high standard of grammar, spelling and punctuation is still required despite the more relaxed approach to the inclusion of figures, tables, bullet points and images.

Please also refer to the Institute leaflets on referencing and essay writing .