CITY OF GLASGOW COLLEGE

Report writing

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Introduction

This student guide covers:

- *Planning* how to write your reports

- *Searching* for relevant information

- *Organising* the information you find

- *Structuring* and writing up your report

This guide introduces the basic principles of report writing to assist your study skills development. It focuses on a *report structure which is useful for both formal and informal reports*. Remember - different courses at the college require different types of report; always consult your lecturer or tutor to find out what they expect in reports for their courses.

As well as this guide, the College Libraries have several other resources to help your report writing skills, including books, software and useful websites.

Planning your report

Before writing your report, start off with a plan. Consider the following:

- What is the main objective of the report?

- What are the various aspects of the report topic?

- How many of the topic aspects should I include in the report?

- How much information do I already know about the topic?

- What do I need to find out about the topic?

You may find using a mind map helpful when considering these points, as they allow you to form a list of what information you already have, what you still need to find and from where. See the Library's *Mind maps* guide for further information.

Searching for and gathering information

In the planning stage, decide what information you need to search for and where you are going to search. When locating information or resources:

- Consider where the information originated. Is the information accurate, current and relevant? Is there any bias?

- Record what sources of information you used – this helps you to reference information accurately.

- Take notes of the information you wish to use. Keep the notes in a logical order – this will help you decide on the content of the report.

- Decide if you need to include any visuals or graphics to back up the points in the report.

Organising the information

Decide how the information you have gathered will fit into the main body of the report. Sort the information into suitable headings that cover the aspects of the report topic. These headings can be used in the main body of the report.

Structuring your report

Once you have gathered the information you are including in the report, and decided how you are organising it, begin to place it into a report structure:

1. *Title page*

    This will include:

    - Title of Report (with a subtitle, if necessary)

    - Name of writer, with personal details – course name, year of study, student ID number

    - Date

    - Circulation list – name of reader (probably the tutor/lecturer who will be marking the report)

    - Contents - dependent on the report size, this could be a separate page

At this stage, a summary of the entire report is sometimes given. Check with your tutor or lecturer marking the report to see if a summary is required. It is a good idea to come back and write it once the report is complete. Ensure the summary is clear and covers all the main points from the report.

2. *Introduction* **– Terms Of Reference**

The introduction should clearly state:

- the subject matter of the report.

- the purpose of the report.

- the readers of the report.

The introduction should also briefly highlight or describe the main body of the report.

3. *Main body of the report*

The main body of the report contains the information you gathered and structured at the planning stage. Each section of the main body may have its own heading and could contain several paragraphs. Less formal reports may just have separate paragraphs for each section of the main body. The main body should:

- contain a series of sections in logical progression.
- present information in a clear and concise manner.

The section in the main body should have the following sub-structure:

1. Findings and evidence
2. Analysis of findings
3. Conclusions reached

4. *Overall conclusion (recommendations)*

Conclude the report by referring to your findings against the purpose of the report. Ensure that your conclusion:

- is brief and conclusive
- states the main points of the report

If you are required to make recommendations, do so at this stage. A larger report may have a separate recommendations section.

5. *Appendix or appendices*

Any information that supports, expands or explains content in the main body of the report should be placed in an appendix. This could include illustrations, statistical tables or large amounts of data that would detract from the structure of the main body. Information in the appendices should be numbered so that it can be referred to in the report and found easily by the reader.

6. *Bibliography or reference list*

A bibliography is a must. You should give full references for all citations, quotes used and background reading. This demonstrates the breadth of your reading and research, and is necessary to avoid plagiarising (intentionally or unintentionally) another's work.

Report writing tips

Researching your report

- Use reliable sources – books and e-books, newspapers, peer-reviewed journal articles and the full range of the Library's electronic resources.

- Remember: Wikipedia is generally not acceptable for academic work.

Writing

- Does your report cover all the points you are trying to make?

- Write clearly and avoid trying to convey too much information at once.

- Who is reading the report – will they understand what you have written?

- Does your report contain technical material? Consider using a glossary in your appendix to explain any technical terms or jargon to your reader.

- Ensure your spelling, punctuation and grammar are correct. Have someone proofread your report before handing it in. Remember that word processor spell check tools can miss mistakes, too.

- Make sure you reference properly. Give full details of another's work you use or cite. See the separate *How to cite references and create a bibliography* guide for full advice. Direct quotes should add to your report – be it for evidence or authority.

Paragraphs

- Write in clear paragraphs. Start with a lead sentence which indicates what the paragraph is about.

- If there are related points in a paragraph, ensure they are grouped together to avoid the paragraph seeming unfocused.

Layout

- Before writing your report, check if the report marker requires or prefers a specific report format.

- Have you made headings and different sections stand out? Use numbering, underlining, bold text, different colours or combine these techniques. Whatever formatting you use, be consistent.

- If you are including diagrams or graphics, decide whether to include them in the main body of the report or whether they would be more appropriate in the appendix. Ideally diagrams or graphics should complement the report and not distract from the actual substance.

Further reading for Report Writing

(Below sites accessed 4 July 2016)

University College Birmingham provides a concise guide on compiling reports here (scroll about two-thirds down the page to 'Report writing'):

http://www.ucb.ac.uk/handbook/academic-matters/essay-writing.aspx

See the University of Reading's study guides covering report writing at:

http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/studyadvice/Studyresources/sta-index.asp

Books in City Campus Library

- Bentley, T. (2002) *Report writing in business: the effective communication of information.* London: Chartered Institute of Management Accountants.
  Location: 808.066 BEN (level 5)

- Currie, D. (2006) *Developing and applying study skills: writing assignments, dissertations and management reports.* London: CIPD.
  Location: 371.3 CUR (level 4)

- Forsyth, P. (2010) *How to write reports and proposals.* 2nd edn. (rev.) London: Kogan Page.
  Location: 808.066 FOR (level 5); e-book also available

- Jay, R. (2003) *How to write proposals and reports that get results.* 2nd edn. London: Pearson.
  Location: 658.453 JAY (level 5)

- Sussams, J. (1998) *How to write effective reports.* 3rd edn. Aldershot: Gower.
  Location: 658.453 SUS (level 5)

Books in the Riverside Campus Library

- Sussams, J. (1998) *How to write effective reports.* 3rd edn. Aldershot: Gower.
  Location: 808.066 SUS

Available as an e-book

- Munro, M. (2006) *Chambers report writing.* Edinburgh: Chambers.