

Structure and organisation

A standard report usually includes the following sections: **Title, Author's details, Date, Contents page, Abstract (Executive summary), Introduction or Terms of reference, Methodology, Results, Discussion, Conclusion (Recommendations) and Appendices.**

Using headings and sub headings is important in report writing and you must make sure your contents page correctly represents the headings system you used in the structure of the report. Readers need to be able to use content pages to identify quickly and easily which sections are most relevant to them and where to find them.

Abstract

It is a good idea to write your abstract (and **Executive summary**, if required) last, once you have completed your report. This section should provide a brief summary of the context, methodology and findings of your report, and is intended to give readers an overview of your project (research) before they continue reading.

Introduction

In your introduction you should include information about the background to your research, and its objectives. Some tutors may expect to see a section called **Terms of reference**, where you identify:

- who asked for the report
- what it covers
- what its limitations are.

Methodology

If your report involved research activity, you should state what that was; for example you may have interviewed clients, organised focus groups, or done a literature review. If you did a literature review, what were the parameters of your search? It may be relevant to refer to your methodology when identifying the scope of your report - who you talked to, and who you didn't.

For example, "this report consulted on the impact within a three mile radius of the factory spillage" or "samples were taken from children evacuated from Kigali".

In a scientific report, the methodology section should provide an accurate description of the materials and procedures used so that others could replicate the experiments you conducted.

Results

The results section should provide an objective summary of your findings, which could be presented descriptively, or by using tables, graphs, or figures.

Discussion

In the discussion section, you are expected to critically evaluate your findings. You may need to restate the aims of your research and whether you were successful. You may also assess the accuracy, representativeness and significance of your findings in the context of previous research on the subject.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Your conclusion should summarise the outcomes, whereas in the recommendations sections you might make suggestions for further research or action to be taken.

Appendices

Reports often use an appendix (singular) or appendices (plural) to expand on points referred to in the main body of the report. You can use appendices to provide backup information, usually data or statistics, but it is important that the information contained is directly relevant to the content of the report. Appendices can be given alphabetical or numerical headings, for example Appendix A, or Appendix 1. Their order at the back of your report is determined by the order in which they are mentioned in the body of your report.

You should refer to your appendices within the text of your report, for example "see Appendix A for a breakdown of the questionnaire results".

Don't forget to list the appendices in your contents page.