



# Report Writing

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**An introductory guide**

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## **Summary**

*Reports are documents used to convey information in a relevant format. This guide will provide some hints and tips about what reports are, how they differ from essays and how best to structure them to create professional looking documents.*

## **Disclaimer**

**Please Note: This guide has been written in the style of a report. However, there are many ways to layout a report. Check your module guide for individual tutor requirements.**

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## **1. Introduction**

1.1 Reports are used in many professions including health, medical, science, government, business, and the police. As they are used to provide key information, they are considered to be a highly effective communication tool. But reports need careful planning to create maximum impact.

1.2 This guide will outline some of the formatting and style issues to consider.

## **2. Differences and Purpose**

2.1 The main difference from essays is that reports can make use of the following to enhance their look and feel:

- ❖ labelled sections
- ❖ headings and subheadings
- ❖ bullet points or short paragraphs
- ❖ images, tables, and diagrams

2.2 Good report writing is a key employability skill. Reports are used to provide information, make recommendations, feedback on surveys or outline strategy. Therefore, a good report should be accessible, readable and attractive.

## **3. Importance of the Brief**

3.1 Reports are usually the result of a specific brief or assignment. The format of the report therefore needs to reflect what your tutor is asking for.

3.2 Read the brief carefully and if need be ask your tutor which layout they wish to see. They may leave that decision up to you as it can depend on your findings.

Here are some basics to get you started:

## **4. Format or Layout**

4.1 Below are some suggested sections for a scientific or laboratory report and a business or policing report. The key is to be flexible so only include those sections relevant to the brief. Therefore, use these suggestions as guidelines and add to, change, or omit sections as needed.

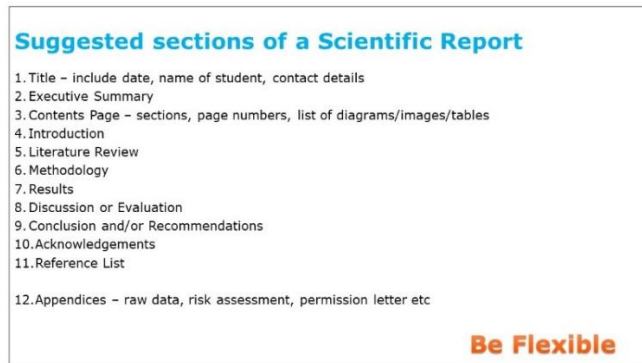


Figure 1: Suggested sections for a scientific report

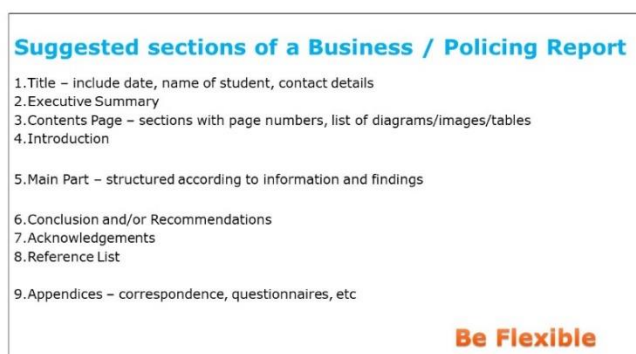


Figure 2: Suggested sections for a business or policing report

4.2 Readers of reports will often 'dip' into a report initially to get the overall messages. Which sections might they read first? Most likely: Executive Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations.

4.3 Word processing applications provide formatting tools such as cover pages, page numbering, headers and footers etc. to enhance the look and feel of the report. For example, in Word click on **File** then **New** and then choose a relevant design.

## 5. Writing skills

5.1 You still need to use formal well-written text. However, unlike essays, the text can be divided up effectively into short sub-sections, possibly using bullets or numbered points to ensure your key messages are accessible.

5.2 You still need to make use of well-structured sentences and paragraphs and use signposting to aid the flow of your text. Find out more on the [Skills@Cumbria](#) website.

5.3 Very carefully proofread your final draft and especially ensure the page numbers match those on your Contents Page.

## 5.4 Highlight text to illustrate key points

**"Reports still need to be written in a good concise academic format"**

To achieve this formatting either insert 2 columns at this point of your report

or

insert a table and make borders invisible.

Text or background could be in colour but be careful to consider issues of accessibility when using colours and avoid using green in particular.

## 6. Visual media to illustrate your reports

6.1 Enhance the impact of your report by including images, map, figures, illustrations, diagrams, tables, infographics as in Fig 3. A few golden rules though:

1. They must all be relevant and have a purpose
2. This purpose must be explained
3. They must be referenced if not your own. Check [Cite them Right](#) for styles
4. They must be labelled
5. They could be listed on the Contents Page so they are easy to find

White-spotted pinion (Plate 2) was found to be present at all five sites where light-traps were operated (Table 2; Figure 1). Table 2 gives the full GPS grid references to the light-trap positions but moths could be attracted to the lights from upwards of 50 m away, such that these trapping positions indicate the presence of white-spotted pinion in the hedges listed in the first column, as well as in the elm woodland on the barracks site.

**Table 2:** Sites where White-spotted Pinion was Recorded

Hedge	Site	GPS grid references <sup>7</sup>
-	Oakington Barracks: elm woodland	TL40561 65625 & TL40516 65646
47W	Mills Lane, Longstanton	TL40293 66135
47E, 48, 49 & 50	junction of Mills Lane, St Michaels Lane and St Michael's Track, Longstanton	TL40469 66098 & TL40498 66133
51 & 52	Longstanton Road, Longstanton	TL40249 65527 & TL40274 65569
45, 15 & 77	Elm avenue along bridleway near Hazlewell Court, Bar Hill	TL38787 63943 & TL38858 64023

Fig. 3: Example of table in a report (Telfer, 2013)

6.2 If appropriate add an image or colour to the title page or front cover of your report. You can also use colour within the main body of your report but be careful to consider issues of accessibility when using colours and avoid green.

6.3 You can also include pop out boxes or text to illustrate key points as can be seen in Fig.4.



Fig. 4: Example of some highlighted text to illustrate a key point. (McKinsey & Co, 2018)

## 7. Example of Reports

7.1 There are many examples of reports on the Internet. If you are looking for examples do so with a critical eye to their content and layout. Always check before you follow their layout that they are suitable for your assignment.

**NB:** *Many freely available on the Internet include very few references whereas your tutor will expect a suitable amount to underpin your thinking.*

7.2 Below are some to give you an idea for different subject areas. Your tutor may also provide some more examples on your Blackboard module.

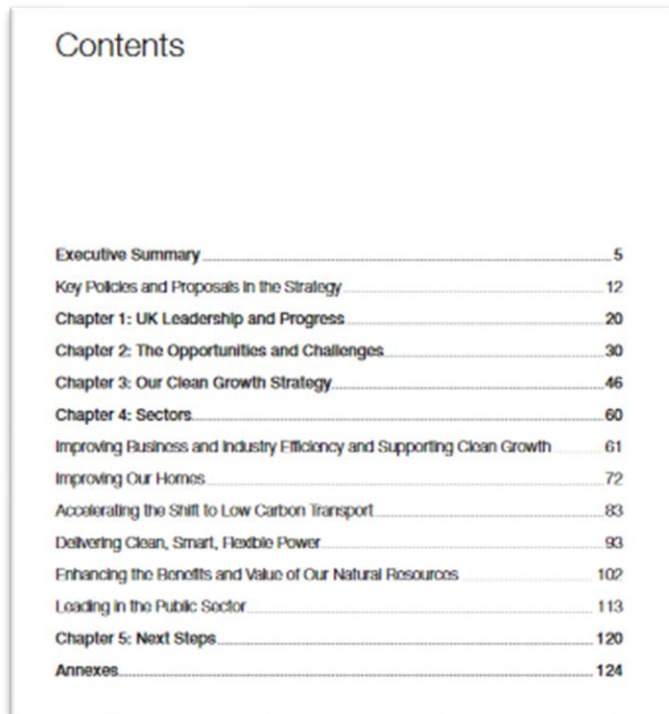
### 7.3 Business / Policing

- [Smart Cities](#) (McKinsey & Co, 2018)
- [Report of the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry](#) (Macpherson, 1999)

### 7.4 Scientific

- [Invertebrate Survey](#) (Telfer, 2013)
- [The Clean Growth Strategy](#) (HM Government, 2017)

7.5 Some techniques used in these examples can be found elsewhere in this guide. Fig.5 shows the contents page from the *Clean Growth Strategy Report* (HM Government, 2017) giving a clear indication of the material to be found in the rest of the report.



Executive Summary .....	5
Key Policies and Proposals in the Strategy .....	12
Chapter 1: UK Leadership and Progress .....	20
Chapter 2: The Opportunities and Challenges .....	30
Chapter 3: Our Clean Growth Strategy .....	46
Chapter 4: Sectors .....	60
Improving Business and Industry Efficiency and Supporting Clean Growth .....	61
Improving Our Homes .....	72
Accelerating the Shift to Low Carbon Transport .....	83
Delivering Clean, Smart, Flexible Power .....	93
Enhancing the Benefits and Value of Our Natural Resources .....	102
Leading in the Public Sector .....	113
Chapter 5: Next Steps .....	120
Annexes .....	124

Fig. 5: Example of a contents page (HM Government, 2017)

## 8. Conclusion

8.1 Draw together the main points of your report which you wish to highlight to your reader.

8.2 This section along with the Summary and the Introduction are the first sections your reader will look in the first instance to provide an overview.

8.3 Once they get the gist of your findings then they may well read the report in more detail.

8.4 It is important you pay particular attention to proofreading to ensure your produce a professional looking report

8.5 Lastly ensure all the content is relevant to the brief.



## 9. References

HM Government (2017) *The clean growth strategy: leading the way to a low carbon future*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/700496/clean-growth-strategy-correction-april-2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/700496/clean-growth-strategy-correction-april-2018.pdf) (Accessed: 9 August 2018).

Macpherson, W. (1999) *Report of the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stephen-lawrence-enquiry> (Accessed: 9 August 2018).

McKinsey (2018) *Smart cities: digital solutions for a more livable future*. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/capital-projects-and-infrastructure/our-insights/smart-cities-digital-solutions-for-a-more-livable-future> (Accessed: 08 October 2020).

Telfer, M.G. (2013) *Invertebrate survey of Northstowe, Cambridgeshire*. Available at: [https://www.scambs.gov.uk/media/8415/es-appendix-f\\_part\\_8\\_0.pdf](https://www.scambs.gov.uk/media/8415/es-appendix-f_part_8_0.pdf) (Accessed: 10 October 2020).

## 10. Further reading

Go to our [report writing Onelist](#) for some recommended books and [Onesearch](#) for our full range of titles available. Some will be aimed at general audiences, others at specific subject areas eg

Bogg, D. (2016) *Report writing for social workers*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Open University Press.

Bowden, J. (2011) *Writing a report: how to prepare, write and present really effective reports*. 9<sup>th</sup> edn. Oxford: How to Books.

Forsyth, P. (2016) *How to write reports and proposals*. 4<sup>th</sup> edn. London: Kogan Page.

Price, M. (2013) *Lab reports and projects in sport and exercise science: a guide for students*. Harlow: Pearson.

Reid, M. (2012) *Report writing*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

## 10. Appendices

10.1 Include appendices if relevant to your report

10.2 These might include your survey results, ethics forms, correspondence, examples of forms from a workplace. It generally should be material NOT found available online (that could be linked to instead if need be).