Business reports

Business reports are **professional** documents, usually requested by someone seeking advice or a recommendation of some kind. The structure, content and language of business reports will vary greatly on two essential factors: **audience and aim.**

Aim

The aim of a business report is usually to investigate an issue and 'report back' findings which allow people to solve an issue, make decisions or take action. Business reports will often be prepared in response to a request either from within an organisation or from an external source or client. Your response might include background information, analysis, interpretation of findings or observations, and often recommendations. These components dictate the structure and content of a business report.

Audience

While your lecturers will have extensive knowledge of the areas you are writing about, in the professional context, your audience may or may not be experts in the subject area and this needs to be considered when you are writing. The content, language and tone of your business report will be determined by your audience. Business reports use these elements – content, language and tone – to communicate information succinctly.

Understanding your audience will help you decide what to include, such as background information or visual representations. For your course assignments, you will be given information about your report's hypothetical audience and your 'audience's' expectations will be found in the course outline, and in marking guides, rubrics or feedback forms. As a university assignment, your business report will also need to include the features of academic writing, including correct, clear and referenced use of sources.

Structure

Business reports are structured and formatted so that they can be scanned for an overview and navigated easily when a deeper understanding is needed. White space on the page helps your reader scan information quickly. For this reason, each component begins on a new page and text is written in paragraphs. The report's structure and format should make logical sense to the reader. All elements must be signposted: for example, your table of contents should provide a clear guide and figures and tables should be captioned.

There are many different types of business reports depending on the professional or industry context and so there is not one structure or template that should be used. For your assignments, you may be provided with a template to use, with guidelines for your structure and content. If you are given a template, remember to **follow instructions carefully** before submitting your assignment; you may need to keep headings provided in the template or you may need to remove any text and headings that have been provided for direction or as examples.

Check your course coordinator's directions on which elements are required in your business report. Usually, your report will include **most or all** of these sections:
- title page
- executive summary
- table of contents
- main body: this section may include:
  - introduction, analyses, literature review, methods, findings, discussion, conclusion, recommendations
- references
- appendices

Title Page
This is a separate page in your report. It includes:
- Title of your report - this should clearly indicate the report's purpose.
- Course name and code
- Your Name/Student Number
- Submission Date

Executive Summary
The executive summary is one of the most important parts of a business report. It should be written on a separate page between the title page and table of contents.

The executive summary provides your audience with a quick, condensed version of the report and in a professional context, it may be the only part that will be read. For these reasons, it is typically between one paragraph and up to two pages in length. The executive summary:

- provides an overview or snapshot of the entire report
- includes the purpose, context, methods, key findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

The executive summary is often written once the whole report is complete. It follows the same sequence of information that is presented in the body of the report. It is acceptable to bullet point recommendations and limitations.
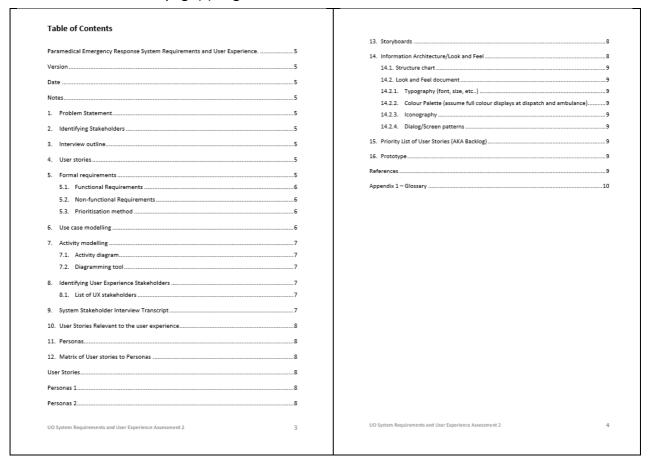
Table of Contents

The table of contents should be on a separate page (or pages) and clearly list the report's sections and pages using headings, sub-headings and page numbers. Headings should be explicit and consistent so that the logical flow of information can be seen immediately. When writing headings and subheadings, consider using:

- key words from your topic sentences (i.e. the first sentences of each introductory paragraph).
- succinct summaries using key phrases from the section. E.g., instead of 'Methodology', use 'Measuring Customer Satisfaction with Surveys', or
- questions, such as 'What makes the AWS system the best?'

Information on creating effective headings and formatting them consistently using MS Word can be found in the Study Help PDF Using headings in your writing.

Your table of contents page(s) might look like this:

Main Body

The main body of the report will depend on your **aim** and **audience.** The components you include will be stated in your table of contents but will include more specific headings and sub-headings. Each component or section should flow logically into the next; think about

your audience's understanding when presenting information and the nature of the issue you are investigating. Some of these components overlap and may not all be required in your report. These components may also be titled to describe the content of your report more specifically (see an example of this above).

The components in the main body of the report may include:

An **Introduction** which summarises:
- the goal and purpose of the report and who or what prompted the investigation
- the significance of the issue or problem (why it is important or relevant)
- the scope of the project (factors considered and limitations defined)
- the structure of the report (mention other sections and briefly what they include).

A **Methods** section which explains how the research was carried out. It might include:
- what research framework was used and why
- how information was gathered and applied.

A **Findings** section which communicates and details facts such as profits and costs, realities of options etc. It might include:
- tables and graphs, numbered and titled in order with headings. This Study Help PDF guide on [Constructing graphs, tables and diagrams](#) shows why and how to use these in your report.

A **Discussion** section which explains your findings. This might include:
- a description of the findings and their implications
- how you interpret the findings to make recommendations
- what alternative approaches would be possible and why they were not used
- an analysis of your method, if applicable — what you did and why.

A **Conclusion** which:
- clearly and briefly summarises the findings and leads into the recommendations.

A **Recommendation(s)** section which is based on the findings, research and data (not personal opinion). Recommendation(s) make specific suggestions to resolve the issues and problems investigated in realistic and achievable ways. This section may also:
- show how this recommendation(s) is/are based on the findings
- indicate the benefits of the recommendation(s)
- summarise next steps for the client.

While it is a common element, not every business report will require recommendations be made; check your assignment instructions or discuss with your tutor.

References

You must use an in-text citation wherever you use information gained from a source. Your reference list must include all material cited in the report including websites, data sources,

articles, reports or images. It must be accurate and consistent with the required referencing system which will be stated in your course outline.

Appendices

This is an optional section at the end of the report and includes supporting or technical information; check with your tutor or assignment instructions if you are unsure whether to include this section. Appendices should be clearly set out and labelled in the order in which they are mentioned in the report (and page numbered according to your Table of Contents). The appendices (or appendix, if singular) contain detailed information, such as:

- charts, graphs and diagrams
- transcripts
- questionnaires
- related reports.

Language and tone

In a business report, language and tone should be authoritative and objective. Active sentences are generally preferred; they establish accountability by stating who is doing the action. For example:

- I/we researched suitable cloud platforms for the winery
- We propose that the company recruit five additional technicians
- We recommend that Howie Media migrate their data to the AWS system using the Re-hosting implementation strategy

Passive sentences are sometimes more appropriate in reports when the language needs to be more formal. Check any assignment guidelines about where active or passive language is most appropriate in your report.

Keep sentences short and concise; ideally your sentences should be no more than 25 words. The best business report writing reads easily and naturally while being professional, clear and respectful. You can achieve this by:

- Avoiding a long word when you can use a shorter word
  - E.g., 'agree' instead of 'acquiesce'/'useful' instead of 'advantageous' etc.
- Avoiding discipline specific jargon
  - E.g., instead of 'we applied linear optimisation', write 'we assessed'
- Avoiding word contractions or 'slang'
  - E.g., cannot instead of can't/'gonna' instead of 'going to'
- Choosing effective reporting verbs
  - E.g., decided, claimed, requested, indicated, discussed, challenges, etc.
- Discussing one main point in each paragraph
- Giving one new piece of information in each sentence; if one sentence has two pieces of information, consider breaking it into two sentences

- Using connecting words where appropriate to create logical flow
  - E.g., therefore, moreover, in addition, in this way, etc.
- Deleting any words that do not add meaning in your sentences
  - E.g., check for overuse of the word 'that'
- Reading your writing aloud, checking for grammar and spelling errors (or use spell check or Grammarly.

Final Tips

Business reports vary depending on the discipline or profession. Check your course outline, assessment instructions, rubrics and templates or talk with your tutor or in discussion forums if unsure. The best way to learn how to write a good business report is to read them. You can ask your course coordinator for examples. Remember your **two guiding questions** for business report writing:

1. What is the aim of this report?
2. Who is the audience?