



Using headings in your writing

Headings are typically used in reports to signpost important content. Relevant, concise, logically sequenced, and consistently formatted headings can help give structure, and make a report much easier to read. When creating headings for your report, consider the following.

Do you know the focus, required approach and structure of the report?

Read the assignment instructions carefully and make sure you understand the topic, the approach (e.g. to inform, to recommend, to provide solutions), and the order of information to be included. Identifying these components can help you plan what headings you will use.

Have you been given a report template and/or specific headings to use?

If you have been asked to use a report template or specific headings then you should do so, as you may be graded on this. The template may include exact headings, a specific layout or a numbering system. If you want to follow a different structure or use your own set of headings, check with your tutor first before doing so, to avoid losing marks.

Do you need to create your own headings for the report?

If you need to create your own headings, read the task to identify the report structure and where information should be located. For example, if you are required to analyse different aspects of an issue, what are they and in which section should they be? Usually, the order in which these are mentioned in the task is the same order you should organise in your report.

How many headings and subheadings will you include?

For **short reports**, use fewer headings so that your writing can be well-developed and supported within each section. Too many sections in a short report will make it difficult for you to develop your ideas in detail. For **long reports or sections with a lot of content**, consider using sub-headings to further divide the information. This will help with the report structure and will make the content easier to read.

What should the headings and subheadings look like?

When creating your headings and subheadings, consider the following four elements:

- **Format:** Be consistent in the style you use for each level of headings and subheadings – this will help your reader to identify the different sections from subsections of your report.
- **Length:** Be concise and to the point – avoid headings which are wordy or too long.
- **Relevance:** Make sure your headings relate to the content below them.
- **Language:** Be consistent with language structure – for example, if your first heading starts with a noun, then try to make sure all of your headings start with a noun.

NOTE: Refer to the example on the next page for an illustration of these four elements.



TIP: Using the 'style' functions in MS Word (see below) to set all your headings, subheadings and labels for tables, graphs and figures will keep your formatting consistent. In addition, you will be able to automatically generate a Table of Contents when you are finished if this is required for your report.



The four elements explained above are illustrated in the following example. The headings and sub-headings are consistent in **format** and it is clear which headings are the main headings and which are subheadings (a numbering system has also been used in this example). The headings are **concise** and **relevant** to the content below them, and the **language structure** is consistent (i.e. Noun phrases are used for all headings). Note that the spacing between sections is consistent too.

1. URBAN PLANNING AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

Here the reader is introduced to the focus of this section which is issues around urban planning and community health. An overview might be given here which includes an introduction to the different aspects which will be analysed below under each of the subheadings.

1.1 Aspect 1

Aspect 1 for urban planning and community health is analysed in the section, developed, explained and supported using reliable evidence.

1.2 Aspect 2

Aspect 2 for urban planning and community health is analysed in the section, developed, explained and supported using reliable evidence.

2. INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

Here the reader is introduced to the focus of this section which is issues around infrastructure and community health. An overview might be given here which includes an introduction to the different aspects which will be analysed below under each of the subheadings.

2.1 Aspect 1

Aspect 1 for infrastructure and community health is analysed in the section, developed, explained and supported using reliable evidence.

2.2. Aspect 2

Aspect 2 for infrastructure and community health is analysed in the section, developed, explained and supported using reliable evidence.