

Elements of a formal report



**ASSIGN
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Throughout a person's life, whether as a student or as a professional, one will come across technical writing. Writing technical reports is an integral part of a student's life especially those preparing for a professional career in the field of Science and Technology, Information Technology and the like. Just the same, professionals must keep a record of their research and study by writing a report about it. Communicating the results of a study is an imperative part of doing research.

Early on in the planning stages of a research, the writer must consider several points in writing such as report topics, report audience, report purpose and report type. In choosing a topic, it is important to decide a specific subject to focus on, as well as to keep in mind the intended readers or audience of the report. A technical report must contain a methodical presentation of the study that includes its approach and methodologies, and most importantly, significant findings of the study. The content of the report must be organized in a manner fitting to the standard outline of any scientific and technical reports.

Elements of a Report Basically, a report contains three major sections or elements. These are: front matter, text (or the body) and back matter. The front matter contains all the materials following the body of the report. Its purpose is to orient readers to the report's content including: front cover, title page, abstract; list of the specific chapters, headings, figures and tables for easy referencing. The contents of the front matter, except the cover and title page, are written only after the report has been completed. **Front Matter** Generally, the front cover is optional but it protects the printed report.

The front cover identifies the report number, the title of the experiment, title and numbering of series (if the report is issued in a series), the author(s), publisher(s), date of publication, and distribution limitations. The title page provides the same information as the cover but it also contains the name of the organization that conducted the experiment, the sponsoring organization for the experiment, and data needed for the description and bibliographic control by libraries, abstracting services and other organizations that acquire such information.

An abstract differs from an executive summary in that it presents the purpose, scope and limitations, methods, conclusions and recommendations of the study but not in full detail. It comes after the title page and before the table of contents. The table of contents identifies pagination of major headings and subheadings in the study. A List(s) of Figures is required for a study that contains 5 or more figures or/and tables, or both, but is optional for fewer than five. Another optional part of the front matter is the foreword.

Written by another authority in the field of study and not the author, a foreword explains the importance of the study and the good qualities of the report being introduced. Information about the foreword writer must appear before the last paragraph. After the foreword is the preface. A preface is different from a foreword in that it is written by the author of the report and explains the purpose for writing the report. A foreword and a preface are not interchangeable, and ideas presented are not redundant.

The last part of the front matter is the list of abbreviation and symbols, although some reports place this at the back matter. This list is required if there are numerous (usually five or more) abbreviations, symbols, and

acronyms used in the report. The list supplies the information of what each abbreviations, symbols, and acronyms stands for. Body The report body is the text portion of the formal report which contains the executive summary; introduction; methods, assumptions and procedures; results and discussion; and conclusion. There are two types of a summary, the descriptive and the informative.

A descriptive summary provides the table of contents in a narrative form, while an informative summary presents the synopsis of the problem or topic, results, conclusions and recommendations. Next to the summary is the introduction. The introduction of a report aims to prepare the readers about the subject matter including its background, its purpose, scope and plan for undertaking such study. In the methodology section, a comprehensive discussion of the procedures in data collection, assumptions and descriptions of the research methodology is presented.

Results and discussions follow the methodology. Here, the interpretation of the data collected is presented and discussed according to its significance in the development of the study. In this section, the writer must write as clearly (read: easy to understand by the readers), and informatively as possible, the scientific content of the study. Major headings in this part of the report should reflect the contents of the sections. The conclusion section presents and analyzes the results from the discussion, and evaluates those results in the context of the entire work.

The conclusion is organized in order of importance to the study. Recommendations based on those evaluations are often cited in this section although they can be contained in a separate paragraph following the

conclusion. The references section cites, in alphabetical order, all the previous works and information consulted in the conduct of the study. Finally, some reports may contain explanatory notes that supplement explanations of terms or ideas for the readers.

It can appear as footnotes (on the same page where the term is) or as endnotes (at the final section) in the report. Back Matter The back matter, like the front matter is not in narrative format because it functions as supplementary pages for the report. It clarifies the body of the report through the appendices, it lists the terms alphabetically for easier comprehension through the glossary; it lists symbols, abbreviations and acronyms; and shows where additional information can be found through the bibliography.

Sometimes, a distribution list is included and it follows the index or glossary, in cases where there is no index in the back matter. This list shows complete mailing address of the recipients of the report. For federal agencies, only their office addresses are shown under The Privacy Act of 1974 which forbids listing of the names and home addresses of federal agents. Having a distribution list is quite useful if errors that can lead to misunderstanding may come up in the future, and corrections need to be made.

Conclusion At first glance, writing formal reports could seem to be daunting and strenuous. Perhaps this is so because of the “technicalities” that it requires for the format and the style of writing. But over and beyond this hurdle, learning to write a carefully crafted and analysed technical report is imperative for the success and development of many disciplines and professions.

Reference

Alfred, G. J. , Brusaw, C. T. , & Oliu, W. E. (2002). *Technical Writer's Companion*. Bedford/St. Martin's: