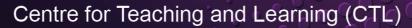# Report Writing

There are various types of reports and, as a result, there are various ways a report can be organised. However, while each report you write may be slightly different, there are stylistic and structural conventions that will apply to them all. The following guide will outline these conventions, which you will then be able to modify according to your assignment requirements.
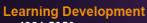
What's the difference between a report and an essay?

A report differs from an essay in a number of stylistic and structural ways:

	Essay	Report
Purpose	Argues a position in response to an issue or a proposition, drawing conclusions about it.	Presents information (facts) and analysis about a problem, and often suggests a solution
Structure and Format	Introduction, body and conclusion. Cohesion is achieved by the flow between paragraphs, and strong paragraph structure. Dot points are not appropriate because an essay aims to provide a more reflective reading experience	Usually Preliminary pages, including an executive summary and table of contents. Has clearly divided sections with numbered headings (and often sub-headings); cohesion ("flow") of ideas is often achieved by the logic of these headings. Brief paragraphs and dot points are acceptable so the reader of a report can extract information quickly. Tables and figures are often included as a way of showing information quickly and easily. Often makes recommendations.

(McKeowen, 2016)

Report Sections

A report has various sections. These can include some or all of the following:

Title page
Table of contents
Executive Summary
Introduction
Literature review
Methodologies
Findings
Discussion
Conclusion
Recommendations
References

Title Page

The **Title Page** usually includes details like: The title of the report, your name (and student number), the name of the course and the course code. The details required on the title page are often stipulated in the assignment/course outline.

Table of Contents

The **Table of Contents** should be compiled according to the headings and subheadings of your report. By using the appropriate Heading functions on Microsoft Word, you can easily auto-format your Table of Contents and create a professional report. As a result, your **Table of Contents** might start to look something like this:

CONTENTS

Sample of actual student work. Permission to reproduce this work, for this purpose, was received from the student.

Executive Summary

The purpose of the Executive Summary is to outline what the overall purpose of the report, and as a result (despite going before the table of contents), it is usually the last thing written (Munro, 2006). It should clarify your report "question", or point of focus, and will generally stipulate your theoretical approach and your more significant findings (Edith Cowan University, n.d.).

Example	Component
This annual report covers progress on the CARE Pathways program between November 2011 and November 2012. The overall goal of Pathways is to increase poor women smallholder farmer productivity and empowerment in more equitable agriculture systems at scale.	Objectives
The program builds on and is inspired by the vital roles that women play around the world in smallholder agriculture, meeting the food and nutrition needs of their households and contributing to economic development. The vision of the program is one of empowered women smallholder farmers celebrated for their contributions to achieving secure and resilient livelihoods and sustainable futures for their households, communities and beyond.	Points of focus
This is being achieved by promoting women's leadership and productive and profitable engagement in intensified, sustainable agriculture value chains. In its first phase, Pathways targets direct impacts on 150,000 poor women smallholder farmers and 555,184 members of their households across six countries (India, Mali, Tanzania, Malawi, Bangladesh and Ghana). The past 13 months have included a 10-month inception phase and three months of active implementation.	Approach
The following highlights reflect CARE's top line achievements during that period. Overall, CARE has achieved nearly all milestones scheduled to be completed during this period with other milestones 'on track' and a very limited set of delays. These factors are discussed in detail throughout the report and in Annex A. Over the reporting period, CARE has made substantial strides toward achieving the program objectives.	Report outline
The process has also yielded significant lessons both on what works for programming for women smallholder farmers and on how CARE can best manage the global program to maximize return on investment for all involved.	Report findings

adapted from Care, 2013.

Introduction

Unlike the executive summary, which gives an overview of the entire report, the introduction contextualises your research and highlights its relevance. It often includes information on the background of the report, its purpose, and the scope of your research (Edith Cowan University, n.d.). It should also indicate key terms of reference that will be used throughout the report, and outline the report's structure.

Introduction:	Component
The purpose of this report is to analyse the decision-making framework of the multinational food company,	Purpose
Greenheart, which was subject to a takeover in 2001 and subsequently became known as Greenheart Plus. Greenheart rates the pursuit of environmental sustainability as the most important corporate objective, which threatened the economic stability of the company. After the takeover, Greenheart Plus paid less attention to environmental sustainability and more to economic sustainability. The decision-making framework also changed with the advent of the new company.	Background and context
This report utilizes a sociological perspective to identify two significant issues of the company, and makes two recommendations to ensure effective decision-making of the company in future.	Scope of research

Sample of actual student work. Permission to reproduce this work, for this purpose, was received from the student.

Literature Review, Methodologies, and Findings:

Depending on the nature of your report, you may be required to include a literature review. Information about Literature Reviews, which involve presenting an overview of existing research in a given field, is available from Learning Development. You may also need to highlight the methodologies used in the research you conducted, and summarise the findings that arose as a result of that research.

Discussion:

The Discussion section of your report is often the lengthiest, and the most detailed. It is here that you critically analyse the findings outline in previous sections of your report, thereby establishing the significance of those findings, and developing an argument that supports your upcoming Recommendations sections. Ultimately, the purpose of this section is to interpret the research and determine whether or not it has provided a sufficient answer to your research question.

Example:	Component
The purpose of the study was to investigate whether Students in Higher Education on an EAP writing course would benefit from computer assisted instruction. The findings clearly suggest that they do.	Overview of findings
The students who took part in the computer-assisted element of the writing course outperformed those who followed the traditional course in every aspect as shown by their performance on the University of Hertfordshire Writing test. They showed particular strengths in the task achievement element of the assessment, suggesting that the computer assisted materials really help the students to understand and focus on the purpose of their writing. It also seems to be the case that the individually directed nature of the on-line materials helps the students to focus on their own specific needs as well as allowing them to access their materials in their own time. Another reason for the success of the materials may be that it allows students to spend more time on the course than is normally the case in a classroom based programme.	Specific findings
This supports and adds to the findings of Jones & Smith (1997) and Harris (2002), who showed similar results for an on-line grammar course. This study has taken a step in the direction of justifying the inclusion of web-based materials in EAP writing courses for post-graduates on English language preparation course. It did however look at a narrow range of subject areas - mainly business, computer science, engineering life-sciences and law - taken by students from only a few countries - particularly China, Japan , Korea and Thailand.	Analysis (with links to existing research/evidence)
It may be the case that students from other countries intending to study different subjects - for example, medicine or humanities - would not benefit in the same way. It is also not clear whether younger students such as students preparing for undergraduate programmes would succeed to the same extent. The approach outlined in this study should be replicated with other students in other subject areas, as well as at other levels in order to be able to recommend the use of on-line materials for all students in all subject areas.	Interpretation

(Gillett, n.d. para. 2)*.*

4 |

Conclusion:

Much like the conclusion of an essay, the **Conclusion** of a report reinforces the points raised in the body sections, and ties these together to form an argument. No new ideas or evidence should be raised in this section – instead it serves to consolidate your assessment of your research/data, and to demonstrate existing gaps or problems that will be addressed in the **Recommendations** section.

Example:	Component
There can be no doubt that 2015 was a year of considerable challenge and achievement for our Member States and for WHO's work in the Region. Nevertheless, because of a clear vision of what is needed and the ability to double our collective efforts, we were able to respond to emerging needs and at the same time continue our adherence to implementing the programme of strategic priorities that we have followed since 2012.	Consolidates research
As we move forward, one of the most important influences on our work with Member States will be the Sustainable Development Goals endorsed by the United Nations in September 2015. The goals are comprehensive in scope and, if achieved, will have profound impact on health development regionally and globally. The goals have been developed with the stated aim of ensuring that 'no one will be left behind'. While SDG 3 is the main goal associated with health, in practice all the goals are of importance to health development, while SDG 3 itself is a key element of achieving sustainable development. Universal health coverage is at the heart of SDG3 and strengthening health systems towards achieving universal coverage will remain the key pillar of all our work.	Highlights problems/issues to be addressed

adapted from World Health Organization, 2015

Recommendations:

The **Recommendations** section is an opportunity for you to suggest solutions to the problem/s highlighted in the body/conclusion of your report. Depending on assignment requirements, this section can require specific detail, including (but not limited to): what action should be undertaken, who should undertake it, what is the time frame of the action, and what costs are involved. **Recommendations** should usually be SMART – meaning they are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely.

Example:
The Queensland Government establishes and supports an advocacy and audit oversight body, comprising representatives drawn from key sectors from the Queensland community (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation) and with an independent chair. The oversight body should: 1. *Be given the role to audit and undertake advocacy for the implementation of the recommendations of this Report and the Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy* 2. *Be required to report to the Premier, initially six monthly, on implementation progress and the performance of the sectors taking action to eliminate domestic and family violence. The frequency of reporting should be reviewed after 12 months from finalisation of the Strategy*

(Kaye et al., n.d. p. 18)*.*

References

As with any academic paper/assignment, your report must include appropriate in-text citations, and a corresponding reference list. Information about referencing is available from the University of Newcastle Library.

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