

# Writing a formal report

There are many different types of reports. This information is a basic outline only. Before you attempt to write a report, you should check the particular requirements for the subject.

A formal report should have the following arrangement.

**1. TITLE PAGE** — The Title Page must include the subject of the report, who the report is for, who the report is by and the date of submission.

**2. ABSTRACT** — An abstract is usually 100 to 200 words and should include the following:

- why the report has been written (i.e. what question or problem is it addressing?)
- how the study was undertaken
- what the main findings were
- what the significance of the findings is.

Be specific and precise so that the reader can get a good understanding of the main points without having to read the whole report.

The abstract should be on a separate page with the centred heading **ABSTRACT** in capitals. It is usually written in a single paragraph with no indentation.

**3. TABLE OF CONTENTS** — The Table of Contents should be on a separate page. It helps the reader to find specific information and indicates how the information has been organised and what topics are covered. The table of contents should also include a **list of figures** and a **list of tables** if any are used in the report.

**4. INTRODUCTION** — The Introduction has three main components.

1. **The Background** which describes events leading up to the existing situation, what projects have been done previously, and why the project or study is necessary.
2. **The Purpose** which defines what the project or study is to achieve, who authorised it and the specific terms of reference.
3. **The Scope** which outlines any limitations imposed on the project such as cost, time etc.

**5. BODY** — The Body varies according to the type of report. Basically, it answers the questions — Who? Why? Where? When? What? How?

In an investigative report, it would consist of all the information required to convince the reader that the conclusions and recommendations are valid/reliable. This information must be presented in a systematic way.

**6. CONCLUSIONS** — The Conclusions should be as brief as possible. They should be presented in descending order of importance and should not suggest action. Conclusions should be free from speculation (i.e. ideas for which you have presented no evidence), have no new thoughts or references introduced and contain no further discussion of points raised.

**7. RECOMMENDATIONS** — The Recommendations should follow naturally from the conclusions. They should be offered in descending order of importance and may be in point form when several recommendations are being made.

**8. REFERENCES** — The list of References is an accurate listing, in strict alphabetical order, of all the sources referred to.

**9. APPENDIX/APPENDICES** — The Appendix/Appendices contain important data, explanatory and illustrative material not included in the text.

### Fonts and Spacing

In general, use a **serif font** (i.e. one with tails on it). They are more comfortable to read. Fonts should be a minimum of 12 point and 1.5 line spacing is recommended unless otherwise specified. Titles and headings may be in a **bold sans serif font**. A blank line, but no indentation, is used between paragraphs.

### Tables and figures

Tables, graphics and photos are placed immediately after where they are first referred to in the text. The reader should also be referred (by number) to the diagrams at the appropriate time in the text and the most important features pointed out to them. Tables, and graphics and photos (called **figures**), should be sequentially numbered. In large reports with many chapters, they are sequentially numbered in each chapter (i.e. for Chapter 2 you will begin from Table 2.1, Figure 2.1). Titles for **tables** are centred **above** the table. Titles for **figures** are centred **below** the graphic.

The source of the table or figure should also be included. The source is usually in a smaller font (e.g. 10 point) and aligned on the left hand margin under a table, and under the title of a figure.