Reporting and Presenting the Project Management Report

Written reports

The purpose of a report is to “sell” your ideas, analysis, discussion and conclusions to the readers.

Reports are written to inform the readers.

Who are the readers?

Why will they read the report?

The same report may be aimed at several different types of readership.

Purpose: to share findings with an outside business, often in response to a specific need or problem.

Therefore the report needs to convey the relevance of the study, its findings and recommendations to the company and/or wider society. Costings and timeframes may also be required.

You should spend more time explaining the real-world context or recommendations rather than the method.

You need to make any technical knowledge accessible to a non-specialist audience.

You need to explain any essential terms or concepts, but be very selective and consider how much you could reasonably expect the reader to understand.

Title page of the report

Title of the report

Authors

Date

Abstract

(No more than 75 words)

The **Abstract** is;

on the front page

Aimed at readers who **may** not read any further but is also a means of attracting such people to read more.

It must not be more than 75 words.
It should be written in the past tense.

The abstract does not include figures or tables, and only the most significant numerical values or results should be given.

The **summary** of your report is

more detailed for those readers who need more information but again **may** not read further.

It must not be more than 250 words and fit on one side of paper, typed in normal size and spacing.

Written in the past tense.

The summary, and the abstract, are NOT an introduction to the report, but a very shortened version of the report, and must include the main recommendations/ conclusions, costs and any other important information.

Imagine that each is a document on its own and that the readers do not have the remainder of the report then ask; “do they communicate what you want the readers to know and what the readers need to know?”

The summary and the abstract, although they appear on the first two pages of the report are the last two sections to be written.

The remainder of the report;

Is for those readers who need the details (perhaps because they will implement the report’s recommendations) in terms of information, discussion and detailed recommendations.

The remainder of your report;

1. Terms of Reference;

   Says why or on what authority you are writing the report and the purpose of the report. It is a definition of the task; your specific objective and purpose of writing. ie who asked for the report and why.

2. Scale: A brief statement on the scale of your work.

   (How much time and effort you put into it in this case and your method of working)

3. Scope: The scope of your study and any areas which were not possible to cover.

These three headings go on together one page, with no other content on that page.

Terms of reference

Scale

Scope

Then on a new page;

4. The general conclusions.

5. Summary of recommendations.

(4 and 5 are not always required especially in shorter reports. You make the decision whether to include these or not.)

The following headings form the “main body” of your report;

6. Description of the present situation. This is where you describe the problem which needs to be solved. You then go on to outline the proposal(s) for solving the problem.

7. An analysis of the proposal(s), including its strengths and weaknesses. No new information should be introduced here only discussion and analysis of previously presented information. This should be the longest section of the report.

8. Detailed recommendations – presented as a numbered list. There should be no analysis or discussion here. You should have justified your recommendations in your analysis and discussion.

   The recommendations should be written in the form;

It is recommended that;

1. *the proposed projects not be adopted,*
2. *further research should be undertaken to identify alternative projects to satisfy the demand for....*
3. *etc....*

9. Specifications of the objectives for action required and the recommended method of approach to implementing the recommendations.

10. Recommended programme of implementation.

11. Closing paragraph

12. Appendices; Detailed statements and calculations, large quantities of data (should be kept to a minimum) Appendices must be referred to in the main text, and careful thought must be given whether to include the content in the main body or not.

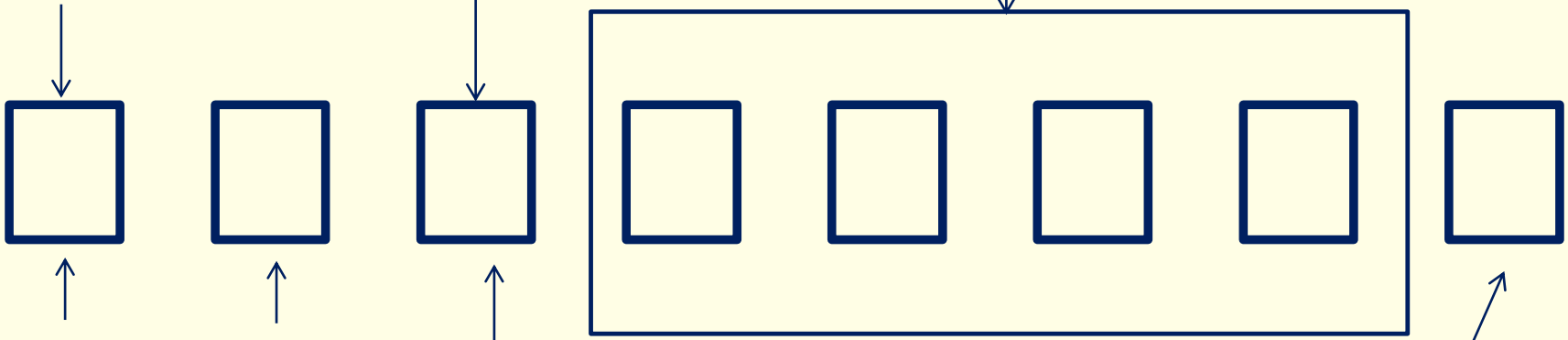
13. References and Bibliography (When needed.)

Summary of the structure:

1. Terms of Reference
2. Scale of your work
3. Scope of your work.

Main body of your report (2000 or so words)

Title Page



Includes the abstract of 75 words

Executive Summary (250 words)

Each of these statements is brief.

Appendices and References if needed. (Not included in the word count).

Referencing

Your report <u>must</u> be referenced in the usual way.

However, you do not include references in your summary and the abstract.

You are reminded of the need to be careful to avoid plagiarism, use paraphrasing appropriately and that your referencing should be complete and correct.

Writing style.

Write formally – do not use jargon, clichés or journalistic styles.

Do not write in the first person. (Do not say for example, “I have....”)

You should write in the third person passive.

Read; Driving out jargon: Whitehall's new vocabulary
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-23462394

Avoid using metaphors – they don't say what you actually mean and lead to slower comprehension of your content.

For example:
drive (you can only drive vehicles; not schemes or people)
drive out (unless it's cattle)
going forward (unlikely we are giving travel directions)
one-stop shop (where it is not a retail outlet)
ring fencing
etc etc

Avoid jargon.

Explain any essential specialist language.

Avoid excessive use of acronyms

Avoid pompous language.

Remove unnecessary words.

Use simple grammatical structures.

Tables are tables all other diagrams, graphs etc are figures.

- Stick to your subject matter
- Focus on facts and stay objective (don’t say “I think...” or “I feel that...”
- Aim for clarity and avoid ambiguity
- Try to eliminate adverbs and adjectives as these can interfere with precise, clear and straightforward writing.

Do not use bullet points – if you need a list number the elements so that they can be referred to easily.

Proofread Thoroughly

It is acceptable and necessary to repeat some things; eg the content of the Summary will be a distillation of the main body of the report and likewise the Abstract will be a distillation of the Summary.

The report is not a “thriller” and you do not need to keep information back at any stage.

Large organisations and consulting companies will have their own formats and styles for reports.

Some organisations have style guides.

eg The Economist;
https://bordeure.files.wordpress.com/2008/11/the-economist-style-guide.pdf
The Guardian and Observer;
http://www.theguardian.com/guardian-observer-style-guide-a
The Telegraph;
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/topics/about-us/style-book/
The BBC
https://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/en/collections/news-style-guide

Critical Thinking

Who	... benefits from this? ... is this harmful to? ... makes decisions about this? ... is most directly affected?	... have you also heard discuss this? ... would be the best person to consult? ... will be the key people in this? ... deserves recognition for this?
What	... are the strengths/weaknesses? ... is another perspective? ... is another alternative? ... would be a counter-argument?	... is the best/worst case scenario? ... is most/least important? ... can we do to make a positive change? ... is getting in the way of our action?
Where	... would we see this in the real world? ... are there similar concepts/situations? ... is there the most need for this? ... in the world would this be a problem?	... can we get more information? ... do we go for help with this? ... will this idea take us? ... are the areas for improvement?
When	... is this acceptable/unacceptable? ... would this benefit our society? ... would this cause a problem? ... is the best time to take action?	... will we know we've succeeded? ... has this played a part in our history? ... can we expect this to change? ... should we ask for help with this?
Why	... is this a problem/challenge? ... is it relevant to me/others? ... is this the best/worst scenario? ... are people influenced by this?	... should people know about this? ... has it been this way for so long? ... have we allowed this to happen? ... is there a need for this today?
How	... is this similar to _____? ... does this disrupt things? ... do we know the truth about this? ... will we approach this safely?	... does this benefit us/others? ... does this harm us/others? ... do we see this in the future? ... can we change this for our good?

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Good writing is difficult, but it is worth taking the trouble to write well.