Business Style Reports

Contents

Introduction

Writing a business-style report is different from writing an essay. Reports are based on a style of writing that you would usually use in business and are set out in a more structured, concise manner. While an essay is usually more theoretically based, and may ask you to look at a concept in a more abstract sense, a report is often based on a real- world task or examples, and shows the application of your learning in a practical scenario.

The following sections outline some requirements and things you should consider when writing a business style report.

Purpose

Intended audience

As this is a business style report, you need to think in terms of writing it for a busy business person, who needs to absorb information quickly. Indeed, you may be asked to imagine you are preparing the report for a specific person in business, or even carry out a project involving a real client who may wish to know your findings. While this is still an academic piece of writing, and you still need to demonstrate your research, a business person is interested in how this research is applied and why it will be useful to them. Think about what they really need to know about your project, what they already know and what they may see as non-essential information or 'padding'.

Topic

Ensure you stick carefully to the topic set. If the brief asks you to investigate the internal communication processes of a company, for example, do not go off-topic by talking

about their external communications. This can be quite tempting if you are finding the research hard! However, this goes back to remembering this in a business context: if your line manager has asked for a report on a specific topic, that is what they want and they will not be impressed by a report about something else.

Scope

While your report should be concise and to the point in the way it is expressed, you do need to ensure that you cover the brief in enough depth that you clearly show you are making informed recommendations. Do you need a case study to demonstrate your ideas in practice? If you are stating that one choice of action is better than another, how can you back that up? Have you considered all the alternatives?

Format

One of the most noticeable differences between a report and an essay is the format in which it is presented. While an essay is one flowing piece of writing with few, if any, sections, a report is usually presented with defined, numbered sections which make it easier to navigate for the busy reader.

You should check for any module requirements from your tutor, but below is a list and explanation of the most commonly required elements of a business style report.

Title Page

This needs to be clear, and for an actual business report would include your name. However, do check any departmental requirements about keeping work anonymous.

Executive Summary

This should contain a summary of all the paper (i.e. the background, project, conclusions and recommendations). Although it comes first, you shouldn't write it until you

have finished the report! Again, it should be concise (usually no more than 5- 10% of the overall report, but do check for any module guidance). Not all reports require this, so do check your module requirements. Don't include it if not required, or it will be a waste of your word count.

List of Contents

This needs to be accurate and includes all titles and subtitles, along with page numbers. Section numbers are also often used in reports. For example:

Introduction

This needs to be concise, to the point and clearly state what the direction and scope of the report is. While some background to the report/project is useful, think carefully about what your reader needs to know about the background, and what might be unnecessary information.

Main Body

This is usually split into sections to help guide the reader. What sections you decide to use will depend on the project and report, but they should follow a logical path which helps to support your conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions/Recommendations

You will be expected to draw conclusions to the report. These will summarize your main findings, and address the issues set in the brief. You may also be asked to make recommendations for action, which should, again, address the issue set in the brief. These are often set out as bullet points. They should contain a concise justification for each recommendation.

Acknowledgements

This is a space to thank anyone who has helped you with the report. They are not usually required for shorter reports, though some people do use them for major projects. If you have worked with a real client or

someone in the industry, it might be polite to thank them here. **This is rarely a requirement.** Don't include them if you are just thanking your mum!

Appendices

Appendices are for information which is relevant or useful, but which might break up the text too much if you included it in the main report. For example, if you had conducted a survey, you may wish to refer to some of the main findings, but putting all of the survey results in the main body may be lengthy. In this case, you could put them in an appendix, and refer your reader to this. Appendices need a title to tell the reader what they are looking at, and they are usually also labelled and referred to in the text as Appendix A, Appendix B and so on. **You should only include them if needed and some tutors prefer you to actively avoid them.** Do check for your tutor's preferences.

References

Your report needs to include citations and a reference list, just like an essay!

Presentation and Tone

As well as splitting the report into more sections to allow the reader to navigate through the report, there are also some ways of presenting information in a report which you may not usually use in an essay. You can use bullet points for lists (which would not be recommended in an essay). Graphs, diagrams and tables are also a useful way of putting information into a report succinctly, and in an easily accessible way. However, do ensure that this is the reason you are including them, and that they have a purpose, rather than using them purely to make the report look attractive! Also remember that they need to be labelled (e.g. Figure 1 or Table 2) and given a title. If they are taken from another source (e.g. a journal article) then they also need to be cited and referenced.

Although some of the aspects of the presentation of a report are different, you should be careful that your tone is still precise and formal. You should still avoid the use of 'I' and 'we', unless told otherwise, and maintain

a formal use of language.

Finally…

Remember, writing a business style report is an important, practical skill for many career paths. Think about writing to impress a future employer!

You might also find the Referencing Images and Tables guide useful:

https://www.salford.ac.uk/data/assets/pdffile/0 01 2/1474968/Referencing-Images.pdf

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