

Self Study Programs: Writing Reports



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This module covers:

- Identifying the process involved in writing a report
- Identifying the key characteristics of a typical report
- Demonstrate your understanding of report - writing by writing a section of a report



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Write Reports

There are many different types of reports. The purpose and audience (why and for whom you are writing) dictates the specific structure, tone and style of a report.

Always check your Subject Outline for specific assignment details.

Almost all reports are highly structured documents, however, and many include key recommendations – like a ‘call to action’ - about a specific topic or issue.

Report Writing: Process

The process of writing a report is similar to that of writing of an essay.

1. Analyse the Question/topic

- What is the aim of the report?
- Who is the report for?
- What are you being asked to do?
- Mindmap/brainstorm the task
- Establish a possible structure

2. Gather Information

- Access resources
- Read effectively and make notes
- Start to organise your information
- Record details for accurate referencing

3. Plan

- Organise your information (another mindmap may be useful)
- Refine the structure of your report
- What are your key findings?
- What are your key discussion points?
- Have you got all your reference details?
- A brief/draft introduction may be helpful

4. Write

- Allow plenty of time
- Follow your mindmap/plan
- Start writing!
- Structure your paragraphs
- Link your ideas/paragraphs
- Use headings and sub-headings (if permitted) to help you logically arrange your information
- If there are any gaps – do a little research – but don’t stop writing!

5. Edit

- Is your information logically organised – does it flow and make sense?
- Have you got all the sections needed in your report and does each of these sections fulfil their purpose?
- Check grammar, spelling and punctuation
- Check the layout and presentation of your report
- Check your referencing

And, don’t forget:

- **Check to see that you have actually answered all parts of the assignment question/topic.**

Report Writing: Structure

Reports have clear sections and it is important that each of these sections meets the reader’s expectations.

How you conducted your research, for example, should be in a section entitled ‘methodology’ and this is where the reader expects to find it. Discussing methodology in a section entitled ‘results/findings’ confuses the reader and is an indication of poor organisation/structure.

Here is an outline of the typical structure of a report:

Typical Sections in a Report

(always check your Subject Outline for the specific requirements of your report writing task)

Title Page	The title (usually written in a way that makes the purpose of the report clear) Who the report is for and who prepared/wrote the report In an assignment context – a due date, student number (check your subject outline for specific requirements)
Table of Contents	A list of all the sections of the report, with a page number indicating where each section can be found.
Executive Summary/Abstract	A summary of the whole report (usually only 1 or 2 paragraphs but covers everything – purpose, methodology, findings, key conclusions and recommendations). Most people write this section last.
Introduction	Outlines the purpose of your report, includes <i>relevant</i> background information/context and clearly defines the scope of the report.
Methodology	An explanation of how you conducted your research. If you collected data – how you collected this data and how you analysed it.
Results/Findings	The findings of your research are presented in this section. It is usually okay to use graphs and tables as well as headings and sub-headings. Don't forget that paragraphs still need to be structured correctly.
Discussion	This is where you interpret and evaluate your findings. Basically, what does it all mean, and why does it matter? What connections can you make in your findings? Are there any connections between your findings and other findings in the wider literature?
Conclusion	A brief summary of your findings/discussion. Just like with an essay conclusion – no new information should be presented here.
Recommendations	What actions/changes/proposals are recommended?
Appendix	Attach a copy – if relevant - of survey/interview questions, glossary of specialised terms etc.
References	Never forget your reference list! You need to list the full bibliographic details of all references used.

(for specific information on Laboratory Reports, see the JCU website: *Writing and Maths Skills Online* – “types of academic writing”)

Guess the Report Section

1. Can you guess in which section the following pieces of information would most likely be found in a report?

The purpose of the current research was to determine key strategies in developing the learning and writing skills of first-year students at James Cook University (JCU). Five hundred first-year students were given a voluntary multiple-choice questionnaire during an *Introduction to University Writing* workshop at JCU. The data were collated and analysed using the *WhizzTechPro Quantitative Database*. Findings showed that an overwhelming 90% of respondents thought that having a personal learning and writing skills mentor would be of most help in their transition to university. This finding suggests that first-year students place priority on individual and small group learning. A key recommendation of the current study is that universities need to allocate additional funding to enable such individualised and small group learning to occur.

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Learning and Writing Skill Key Strategies for First-year students at James Cook University



Graph title/explanation

A quantitative methodology was used as this allowed for the collection and collation of data from a larger number of respondents.....

Your Turn

2. Here are some useful (made-up) pieces of information about coffee (you'll probably be drinking lots of coffee while writing?). Feel free to add your own information. Try writing a brief section of a report. Where possible, work in groups with each group writing a different section. Put all the sections together at the end. How did you go?

Report Purpose: to find the best 10 local coffee shops. Report funded by the Coffee Drinking Association of North QLD. No previous research of this nature found in the existing literature (hence the need for the current research).

Methodology: a survey (voluntary and random). 500 people asked what their favourite coffee shop was and why. People asked in CBD at lunchtime (12-2) by 5 university students. Ethical approval for the research already granted from university. All results anonymous (no personal/identifying details recorded). Exactly the same question was asked of each respondent: what is your favourite coffee shop and why? Results were collated using Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and analysed by the researchers.

Background/interesting information:

1. According to Smith (2013) there are three key requirements to making a quality cup of espresso coffee (as determined by an International Judging Panel in 2013): a fully trained and experienced barista, a quality espresso machine and freshly roasted A-grade coffee beans.
2. According to Brown (2012) the main factors to consider when using an espresso machine include the amount of coffee put into the group handle, the quality of the tamp (pressing down on the coffee in the group handle evenly) and the quality of the extraction (should be around 25 seconds and have the consistency of dripping honey). If adding milk, the milk must be textured and brought up to an optimal temperature (usually somewhere around 65 degrees).
3. According to Tanaka (2011) Key qualities in a good barista include: an engaging personality and the ability to work under pressure (ie. the ability to talk to customers and make multiple coffees at the same time without compromising on the quality of the coffee). Latte art (the fancy pattern on top of the coffee) is also a positive benefit as it impresses customers.
4. According to Fabre (2010) there are different types and grades of coffee beans. These differences can be graded on location – as in a country or region – and can also be more specifically determined on the location of the bean within a specific farm (eg. the particular crop gets the morning sun or afternoon sun). A coffee shop may serve single origin coffee (coffee from a single location) or can serve a particular type of coffee blend (coffee sourced from different locations and mixed together).

Results:

Quality of the coffee (80%), food (75%) and the ambience of the cafe (60%) were the 3 key criteria in people's choice of cafe .

Top 10 local coffee shops (in order) were: Crema Cup, Java Joe, Barista Bru, La Latte, Cup a Cinno, Hot Coffee, Coffee 4 U, Cafe Cino, The Grind and Coffeelicious.

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If you're not able to access our on-campus services, you can contact The Learning Centre for advice and remote assistance.

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