CCG Libraries Study Skills Helpsheet Series	Report Writing – the basics

What is a report?

"A report is the formal method of communicating results of a project or research assignment. It may cover a laboratory experiment, survey, questionnaire or case study … Reports are structured in broadly similar ways to that readers can find information quickly" (Cottrell, 2019, p. 363).

If you are asked to prepare a report for a particular subject, it is important to understand how they differ from essays:

Reports	Essays
Reports often originate from outside the academic world. They are typical of the writing required for the world of work.	Essays mostly originate in academic settings.
Reports often present data and findings that you have collected yourself.	Essays usually focus on analysing or evaluating theories, past research by other people, and ideas.
Reports are divided into headings and numbered sections and, sometimes, subsections.	Essays do not: they flow as a continuous piece of paragraphed text. Note: paragraphs should not have headings or numbering.
Reports contain tables, charts and diagrams.	Essays don't contain these.
Reports have a table of contents.	Essays do not.
Reports usually include descriptions of the methods used.	Essays don't usually refer to such methodologies
Reports include a discussion section that looks at how the research design or methods could be improved and areas for further research.	Essays don't normally reflect on the process of researching or writing the essay.
Reports may include recommendations for action.	Essays do not.

(Table adapted from Cottrell, 2019, p. 363)

The Structure of reports

Be aware that there is no one right way to write a report, as it often depends on your subject and on the purpose and audience for the report. The structure of reports however do differ significantly from essays and are divided into several headed sections (and sub-sections).

Most reports use an IMRD structure: Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion. Here are some common sections that also appear in reports. Note that there are different terms for some sections.

➢ Table of Contents. Here you set out the number of each section, its title and page number and any sub-sections. Sub-section numbers and details start under the section title, not the margin or the number.

➢ Abstract, sometimes called an Executive Summary. This provides a very brief summary of the report and is usually the last thing you write.

➢ Introduction. This describes the purpose of the report, explains why it necessary and/or useful, and sets out its precise aims and objectives.

➢ **Literature Review**. This describes current research and thinking about the problem or research question. It is often incorporated into the introduction.

➢ **Methods** (or **methodology**). This describes and justifies the methods or processes used to collect the data.

➢ **Results** or **Findings**. This only presents the results (or processed data) from the research. Therefore, it may consist mainly of, for example, tables, charts and/or diagrams.

➢ **Discussion** (or **analysis** or **interpretation**). This analyses the results and evaluates the research carried out.

➢ **Conclusion**. This summarises the report, and usually revisits the aims and objectives.

➢ **Recommendations**. If required, this is where the writer uses the results and conclusions of the report to make practical suggestions about the problem or issue.

➢ **Appendices**. If required, you can include any raw data or materials the report refers to in the appendix. The data is often presented in the form of, for example, charts, diagrams and tables. They are numbered: for example, write Table 1 and its title; Table 2 and its title etc.

(Taken from the University of Portsmouth online MYPORT site: https://myport.port.ac.uk/study-skills/written-assignments/key-features-of-academic-reports)

Key Report Writing Tips:

~ **Tenses**. When reporting your findings use the past tense (e.g. 'our project found that 20% of people …'). When reporting other people's research, use the present tense, as you as relating to established facts (e.g. Jones states that 95% of people now use smartphones). Also use the present tense discussing your findings (e.g. 'we conclude that …').

~ **Write objectively**, reporting the evidence as it appears. Don't give personal opinions or unsupported claims.

~ **Write accurately** – give clear descriptions and figures/numbers.

~ **Write for the reader** - identify the purpose of the report and your audience. Provide the information they need to understand your work.

~ **Edit your work thoroughly** – delete unnecessary words or sentences and make sure the work is grammatically correct with correct spelling. Afterwards proof read your work with 'fresh eyes' and make sure you reference any information, statistics, images or opinions from others (see separate APA referencing guide).

References:

Cortrell, S. (2019). *The study skills handbook* (5th ed.). Red Globe Press.
University of Portsmouth. (2021). *Reports and essays: key differences.*
https://myport.port.ac.uk/study-skills/written-assignments/reports-and-essays-key-differences