Report writing: Purpose

Student & Library Services
Purpose of report writing

• “A report is the formal method of communicating the results of a project or research assignment.” (Cottrell, 2013)

• May cover:
  • what you did
  • how you did it
  • what you found out
  • why your findings are important
  • who it is for
## Report writing compared with essay writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reports</th>
<th>Essays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written for a specific audience</td>
<td>Not usually written for a specific audience (apart from your lecturer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to focus on a specific brief</td>
<td>May have a broad scope – need to interpret and define the question</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make recommendations supported by appropriate (referenced) evidence</td>
<td>Makes a coherent argument supported by appropriate (referenced) evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can contain diagrams, tables and figures</td>
<td>Shouldn’t contain diagrams etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally structured with headings and sub-headings</td>
<td>Shouldn’t use headings and sub-headings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written in an appropriate style for each section (e.g. may use a different style for methods than for discussion)</td>
<td>Written in a single style throughout</td>
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</table>
Questions to ask yourself

- **What am I being asked to do?** Check the project brief and module guide. Ensure you know whether the purpose of the report is to inform, test, persuade, advise, recommend etc.

- **Who am I writing for?** You need to know who your audience are (e.g. a professional body), what they already know and what they want to know.

- **Why am I being asked to do it?** You will need to make recommendations based on your findings.

- **How does my audience want the information presented?** Check guidance on structure, format and layout, including the word count.

- **When does my audience want the report?** Check the assignment deadline.
References and resources

