



**Brisbane** Campus

# **BUSINESS REPORT WRITING**

## **A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS**

# BUSINESS REPORT WRITING

## What is a report?

A report is an organized and objective presentation of information that serves a business purpose.

There are two basic kinds of report:

- **Informational reports** tell the reader about a topic. They present information without analysis or recommendations. They present relevant facts clearly and concisely.
- **Analytical reports** aim to convince the reader to do something. They analyse and interpret data and make recommendations for some action. The report writer's task is to select and emphasise the facts and arguments to convince the reader that the conclusions and recommendations are valid.

You will usually be required to write analytical reports at University and for business.

This document will focus on how to write an analytical *Business Report*.

## Report Presentation and Layout

Business reports are very different from essays. Reports are always broken up into sections with headings and numbered sections.

Although report formats vary, most reports contain the following sections:

- Front Matter
  - Title Page
  - Letter of Transmittal
  - Table of Contents & List of Illustrations (if any)
  - Executive Summary
- Report Body
  - Introduction & Background Information
  - Report Findings & Discussion
  - Conclusion & Recommendations
- End Matter
  - References
  - Appendix

## Title page

Unless otherwise stated the title page of your report should include the following details:

- title of the report
- your name and student number
- due date for the assignment
- name of the tutor or Lecturer for whom the report was written
- the name of the subject (including the subject code)

## Letter of Transmittal

A report usually includes a covering letter or message to the person who requested it. Basically, the writer says, "Please find attached the report you requested." This covering letter or message should be written as a brief formal letter. It must clearly state **WHEN** the report was written, **WHO** it is written for and the **PURPOSE** of the report.

### Example Letter of Transmittal

Mr. William Jones  
Director  
Future Strategy & Solutions  
147 Success Street  
Brisbane QLD 4000

01 April 2014

Ms. Eleanor Smith  
Manager  
ACME Pty Ltd  
592 Zig Zag Avenue  
Strathpine QLD 4500

Dear Ms. Smith

As requested, the team of Future Strategy & Solutions has prepared a report examining the effectiveness of current policies and procedures of your workplace organization. The purpose of this report is to present the findings based upon research and to provide recommendations concerning how best to proceed in the future.

The findings of the report demonstrate that constantly refining and modifying policies and procedures within the workplace organization adds value and works toward compliance and streamlining work activities.

Yours Sincerely

William Jones  
Director  
Future Strategy & Solutions

**Table of Contents and List of figures, tables, illustrations.**

This page(s) is used to outline the sections of the report. The contents page should list the main section headings and any sub-headings of the report together with their page numbers. Make sure that the contents numbering system is the same as the one you use throughout the report. If there are more than six figures, tables and illustrations they should be listed on a separate page with the page numbers in the text.

**Example of a table of contents**

CONTENTS		
1.	Introduction .....	1
2.	Literature review .....	2
3.	Methodology .....	4
	3.1. Participants .....	4
	3.2. Focus groups .....	5
	3.3. Survey forms .....	7
4.	Results .....	10
5.	Discussion .....	13
6.	Conclusion .....	15
7.	Recommendations .....	16

From: <http://www.deakin.edu.au/current-students/assets/resources/study-support/study-skills/ex-table-contents.doc>

**Executive summary**

A good executive summary allows a busy reader to get the main points of the report without reading the whole report. It is usually a half to one page long.

It should include:

- The purpose of the report
- The scope of the report
- The methods used in any investigations
- The main findings and points of discussion
- The main conclusions of the report
- The main recommendations

### Example of an executive summary

<p>The purpose of this report was to examine the implications on university teaching raised in the article by Joe Gelonesi in the Education Supplement of <i>The Age</i> (27/2/02). Research for this report included a review of current literature on web-based tuition and interviews with three experienced academics.</p>	<b>Purpose</b>
<p>The major findings indicate that while there is a need for some caution, e-learning should be seen as a way of enriching the teaching and learning currently being offered in universities.</p>	<i>Methodology</i>
<p>While it is clear that student needs will vary, this report recommends that Beacon University continue to develop and implement its e-learning approach if it wishes to continue providing quality education for traditional on-campus students as well as those who for work, family, geographic location or other reasons choose to study through distance education.</p>	<i>Findings</i>
	<i>Conclusion &amp; Recommendations</i>

From <http://www.deakin.edu.au/current-students/assets/resources/study-support/study-skills/ex-exec-summary.doc>

### Introduction and Background Information

The introduction explains the background to the report, its purpose and the points covered. The introduction of a report usually covers some or all of the following points:

- purpose or reason for writing the report
- background information (e.g. brief history, context of topic, organisation or problem; when report was requested)
- the scope of the investigation – that is, what is covered and what is not
- the methods used – for example the kind of data used. In some reports, the methodology may be set out in a separate section
- assumptions and limitations, (e.g. given the above material, what assumptions did you make and what limitations does this place on the material that follows)
- an outline of the structure of the report.
- A good introduction will be short and will help to guide the reader.

### Example of an introduction

<p>In an article entitled, <i>Few honours for e-degree</i>, Joe Gelonesi (2002) presents many a cautionary tale for institutions embarking on e-learning. The purpose of this study was to investigate the issues raised in this article on Beacon University's increasing use of online technology in the delivery of its courses. The information gathered was to assist in continuous improvement and decision-making with regard to modes of course delivery.</p>	<p><b>The reasons for undertaking the study are outlined</b></p>
<p>Based on Federal Government and industry reports (DEET 1999; McInnis 2001; Smith 2001) it was assumed that competition from private educational organisations will increase and that student engagement with universities is changing. This will necessitate universities rethinking what they offer and the way they offer it.</p>	<p><b>Any assumptions made in the study are noted</b></p>
<p>The experiences of academics currently teaching in three Schools were considered in terms of changing student needs and acceptance of the new technologies by students and academics.</p>	<p><b>The scope or extent of coverage is clarified</b></p>
<p>Information was gathered by way of interviews with the selected academics. This was supplemented by a review of current literature on e-learning.</p>	<p><b>Methodology (how the research was conducted) is outlined</b></p>
<p>Although expressions of interest were sought from students for focus group discussions, none were received and interviews were therefore limited to academic staff. While the lack of a student voice on such an important issue is a limiting factor, much of the literature makes clear the issues for students in the current educational-economic climate.</p>	<p><b>Limitations of the study are explained</b></p>
<p>In this report, the issues raised in Gelonesi's article are identified and set amongst the current literature relating to online learning. These findings are then contextualised at Beacon by considering the perceived student and staff needs as identified through structured interviews.</p>	<p><b>Plan of the report is specified</b></p>

## **Report Findings and Discussion**

The main body of the report should contain a clear explanation of what you have discovered and how you have found it out. It is similar to the body section of an essay. This is a significant part of the body of your report - in fact, it should be approximately 60% of the total word count.

This is the section which should contain the basic facts supported by examples, quotations, charts, diagrams etc. You must use in-text referencing here to show where you have obtained the information necessary to have written the Report.

The Findings and Discussion section is often divided into sub sections with headings that describe the topics covered. These should be numbered using the decimal system. Another way to divide up the main body is:

- Procedure - what you did
- Findings - what you have found out
- Discussion - relating what you have found out to what the reader already knows

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This contains the conclusions you draw from the information presented in the main body of the report and then your suggestions for action or change – your recommendations.

Conclusions should be firmly and briefly stated. They are approximately 5% - 10% of the total word count. You should NOT introduce new information.

Sum up the main points and refer to any underlying themes. Ask yourself “On the basis of the research, what conclusion can be drawn?” and then make sure you answer that question.

Recommendations are suggestions for actions or change. They are written as action statements without justification or explanation and they are stated in clear, specific language. They should be expressed in order of importance.

## Example of a conclusion

<p>Online learning has become an important aspect of the way education is delivered. Initially, in tertiary education this push came about as a way of reducing course delivery costs, but as Gelonesi (2002) points out, online delivery is not necessarily a cheaper way of doing things. Some in the education sector also argue that online education is 'second-rate' because education is fundamentally interpersonal, and technology interferes with and reduces this interaction.</p> <p>However, it is becoming evident that students are seeking greater flexibility in their engagement with universities. For tertiary institutions like Beacon University, online delivery is an important way of providing this flexibility. As a major provider of tertiary education, Beacon has begun to introduce an online component into many of its courses. Most of Beacon's course materials are online, as are some administrative processes. A significant move is now being undertaken to put student support services online.</p> <p>So, while the concerns about online education cannot be ignored, universities need to embrace this development, not as a replacement for face-to-face teaching, but as an alternative delivery mode. In some situations it may well be a more flexible alternative that better suits the needs of students. As Professor Anne Martin, Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Deakin University notes, "...[online learning is] a developing field and it's very exciting but it's important it's offered only where it's going to be better, more effective and more efficient" (in Gelonesi, 2002, p.3).</p>	<p><b>Restatement of questions/problems that led to the preparation of the report</b></p> <p><b>Summary of key points</b></p> <p><b>Link back to the purpose of the report</b></p>
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From: <http://www.deakin.edu.au/current-students/assets/resources/study-support/study-skills/ex-conclusion.doc>



## Example of recommendations

<p>This report recommends that Beacon University:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Articulate a plan for further development of e-learning across all faculties.</li><li>2. Establish a working party to oversee and plan the implementation of e-learning across all faculties.</li><li>3. Conduct a forum to showcase exemplar units that have successfully incorporated e-learning.</li><li>4. Continue to investigate and document the needs of students and how the University can better meet these needs through a range of delivery modes, including online delivery.</li></ol>	<p><b>Suggested solutions are presented as action statements – things to be done</b></p> <p>←</p> <p><b>These are numbered and in a logical sequence</b></p>
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From: <http://www.deakin.edu.au/current-students/assets/resources/study-support/study-skills/ex-recommend.doc>

### Reference List

Like an essay, a report must contain a reference list or recommendations for reading in a full bibliography. The reference list should give information about all sources cited in the report. Use the APA referencing format.

### Appendices

Information not referred to in the main part of the report should be attached in an Appendix. This information is relevant but not necessarily essential to the larger overview. Appendices may include tables, texts, graphs, diagrams, photographs, questionnaires, etc.

These guidelines are not prescriptive and some academic staff may have their own preferences, so it is important that you consult the subject outline and/or the tutor before proceeding.

References:  
The Endeavour – JCUB Student Handbook  
Deakin University Study Skills