

Technical report writing

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Introduction

The report writing laws:

1. The reader is the most important person
2. Keep the report as short as possible
3. Organise for the convenience of the report user
4. All references should be correct in all details
5. The writing should be accurate, concise and unobtrusive
6. The right diagram with the right labels should be in the right place for the reader
7. Summaries give the whole picture, in miniature
8. Reports should be checked for technical errors, typing errors and inconsistency
9. The report should look as good as it is
10. The reader is the most important person

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SECTION 1: OBJECTIVES

- What does the reader already know about the material of this report?
- How wide is his/her knowledge of the subject?
- Why should the particular reader need this particular report?
- What is it necessary to tell the reader?
- What will be his/her expected response?
- What, from the writer's point of view, is the desired response?
- How can the writer bridge the gap between what the reader knows already and what the writer wants him/her to know, in order to produce the desired response?

LAW 1 The reader is the most important person

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SECTION 2: THE FORMAT OF THE REPORT

1. obviously important information which must go into the report because it is completely relevant to the objectives
2. borderline information which might be useful to some readers, or which might amplify or substantiate other more important material
3. information which is interesting (or not) to the writer, but which is not relevant to the objectives of the report

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2.1 Beginning and end

- What does the reader already know about this work?
- How much background (to this project or whatever) will he need in order to understand the argument of the report?
- Has he been closely involved with this, or similar, work before?

2.2 Appendices

LAW 2 Keep the report as short as possible

2.3 Sections and sub-sections

LAW 3 Organise for the convenience of the report user

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2.4 Headings and decimal notation

2.4.1 Format

Title page
Acknowledgements
Summary
Table of contents
Introduction/Terms of reference
Procedure
Findings
Conclusions
Recommendations
References/Bibliography
Appendices

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2.4.2 Notation

1. MAIN HEADING

1.1 Lesser heading

1.1.1 Small heading

...

8. MAIN HEADING

8.1 Lesser heading

8.1.1 Small heading

2.5 References

LAW 4 All references should be correct in all details

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SECTION 3: THE WRITING OF THE REPORT

LAW 5 The writing should be accurate, concise and unobtrusive

3.1 Accuracy

3.1.1 Spelling

Technical words and names
Problem words
New words

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3.1.2 Punctuation

3.1.3 Choice of words

3.1.4 Sentences

3.1.5 Paragraphs

3.2 Brevity

3.3 Unobtrusive writing

3.4 Worked example

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SECTION 4: ILLUSTRATING THE REPORT

LAW 6 The right diagram with the right labels should be in the right place for the reader

- 4.1 Positioning
- 4.2 Conventions
- 4.3 Clarity

4.4 Tables and graphs

- 4.4.1 Tables
- 4.4.2 Graphs
- 4.4.3 Space
- 4.4.4 Diagram references

- Does it give the required information?
- Does it reproduce faithfully the information intended (for example, the segments of a pie chart)?
- Is it easy to use?
- Does it look attractive?

SECTION 5: FINISHING THE REPORT

5.1 Summaries

LAW 7 Summaries give the whole picture, in miniature

- 5.2 Abstracts
- 5.3 Contents lists
- 5.4 Checking

LAW 8 Reports should be checked for technical errors, typing errors and inconsistency

5.5 Appearance

5.5.1 Title pages

LAW 9 The report should look as good as it is

SECTION 6: CONCLUSION

LAW 10 The reader is the most important person