



A report is a document that investigates a topic or issue. It often recommends action to solve a problem and usually makes recommendations.

## Process

### 1. Analyse the task

- Identify the purpose and the audience.
- The purpose statement contains words like, “The aim of this research task is to investigate/analyse/...”
- The audience is the person who has commissioned the research e.g. client or manager.
- Be clear about what the task is – it might help to rephrase the task as a question.
- Decide what sections to use in the report. See the sample headings over the page. You may not need all these headings, or you may need to create your own. Check your subject outline and the subject’s Interact2 site in the first instance, but if you are not sure what the report requires, speak to your lecturer.

### 2. Brainstorm

- Bring all your ideas together on one page to:
  - ✓ Identify what you already know.
  - ✓ Identify the focus of your research and eliminate any gaps.
  - ✓ Begin a plan: Mind maps are very useful at this stage.

### 3. Start your research

- Begin with recommended texts and library material.
- If required, conduct any tests, surveys or other research tasks. Make notes on findings.
- Organise your material into headings and topics.
- Look for ways to structure the sections of the report, and organise your results and research.
- Record all bibliographic details of sources to save time, ensure accuracy, and avoid plagiarism.

### 4. Plan the report

- Organise the information – make headings and connections. Using a diagram or mind map may be helpful.
- Your plan should include:
  - ✓ findings – main points with headings to indicate the topic.
  - ✓ discussion points – their relationship to the findings.
  - ✓ references.
  - ✓ **brief** outlines of the introduction and conclusion.

## 5. Continue your research

- This is focused research, so provide evidence from research to expand on the main points.
- Use efficient reading strategies to locate the information you need.
- Use search terms from your earlier research to locate precise and credible information and evidence.

## 6. Write

- Write up your findings section first and then your discussion. Review your plan and decide on a logical order for your points and evidence. Use clear headings to signpost each section.
- Then write the other sections: conclusion, recommendations, methodology (if applicable) and the introduction.
- Remember, a paragraph must contain one main idea—stated in the topic sentence. Other sentences explain, support and give evidence from research and/or examples. Refer to diagrams etc. in the paragraphs. Expect to write several drafts.
- Reference carefully. You must always acknowledge your source—whether quoting directly or paraphrasing (content rewritten in your own words).

## Typical research report structure

Below is a list of the sections commonly found in a report and what they contain:

### Title page:

- Title: states the purpose of the report.
- Details of the person(s) for whom the report was prepared.
- Includes the subject name and code.
- Details of the person(s) who prepared the report (student name and ID). Due date.

### Executive Summary/ Abstract:

- A brief overview of the whole report, designed for quick perusal.
- Outlines the report's purpose, research method, findings, main conclusions and recommendations.
- The executive summary should be able to stand alone and be read independently of the report.
- The reader/audience can easily identify what, how and why.
- Written last, after other report sections are known and can be summarised.

### Table of contents:

- A list of sections and subsections of the report, ordered by page number.
- Can be created automatically using heading styles in most common word processing programs.

### Introduction:

- Provides a broad introduction to the topic or research area and its context.
- Outlines the aims and rationale for the study.
- Includes the report's limitations or scope.
- Although presented first, can be written later.

### Methodology:

- Explains how the research was conducted.
- Details how data was collected and analysed.

### **Results/Findings (may be combined with discussion):**

- Presents the outcome of the data analysis.
- Facts only – no interpretations.
- [Supported by tables and graphs with captions.](#)

### **Discussion:**

- Presents an interpretation and evaluation of the results.
- Analyses results – draws together different aspects of the findings, findings of other studies, and refers to the literature.

### **Conclusions (may be combined with recommendations):**

- A summary of the main findings of the report.
- The conclusion contains no new information.

### **Recommendations:**

- Suggests suitable actions/changes/solutions that may arise from your research and findings.
- This section can sometimes be combined with the conclusion.

### **Appendix:**

- The appendices include any additional relevant information that is too lengthy to be included in the report's body.
- This can include surveys, questionnaires, detailed data sets, large tables and/or figures, glossaries etc.
- Each appendix should be individually numbered, titled and included in the table of contents.

### **References:**

- A reference list containing correctly cited details of all information sources used in the report.
- Presented in alphabetical order by author, see our [referencing section](#) for details.

**Note:** Additional headings and sub-headings to those listed are content based and specific to the report. Headings and sub-headings need to be consistent. Consider using heading styles in your word processing software to format headings and create a table of contents.

## **Reach out for help**

The Charles Sturt Academic Skills team is here to help you develop your learning skills. You can also:

- check out our [Guide to writing in science](#).
- ask a question on our [Ask an Academic Skills Adviser forum](#),
- join one of our [Academic Skills workshops](#), or
- access further information about all of our available services and learning resources, including assignment writing feedback, at [csu.edu.au/academicskills](http://csu.edu.au/academicskills).

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