5 Step Guide to Report Writing

The purpose of report writing:

- o To communicate a research process clearly and simply
- o To give logical structure to the methods, results and findings of research
- o To inform the reader of the findings and possible recommendations of the research
- o To be easy to read and navigate for the reader
- o To develop clear, concise communication and documentation skills

1. Read the brief/terms of reference carefully

The brief should tell you:
- ➢ Who the report is for **(audience)**
- ➢ What they want to find out **(purpose)**

- Think about what questions the audience want to find answers to
- Ensure that your report addresses these questions in the Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion

2. Plan each section

- Plan each relevant section using bullet points/spider-diagrams/short paragraphs, or any other suitable method

- Common elements that are found in reports include:
  - o Title Page
  - o Acknowledgements
  - o Contents
  - o Abstract or Summary
  - o Introduction
  - o Literature Review
  - o Methodology
  - o Results or Findings
  - o Discussion
  - o Conclusion and Recommendations
  - o References
  - o Appendices

- Consider the role each item will play in communicating information or ideas to the reader:
  - o Does it provide background to your research? (**Introduction** or **Literature Review**)
  - o Does it describe the types of activity you used to collect evidence? (**Methods**)

- o Does it present factual data? (**Results or Findings**)
- o Does it place results or evidence in the context of background reading (**Discussion**)
- o Does it make recommendations for further action? (**Conclusion**)

3. Relate findings to background research

- When writing your discussion, look back at:
    - o Your original research questions
    - o Your literature review or any wider reading

- Keep these in front of you as you write
- Ask how your findings answer your research questions
- Use your background reading to help interpret your results
- Does this research provide any possible explanations or evidence to support your interpretations or findings?
- Do your findings confirm or contradict previous research findings?

4. Put yourself in the position of the reader

- Reports are designed to be informative: think about your audience and their needs
- Ask yourself the following questions:
    - o What does your reader already know?
    - o What do they want to find out?
    - o You know what you mean, but can your reader follow your reasoning i.e.do you jump from one idea to another without explaining them fully?
    - o Is all of the information relevant to the reader?

5. Edit ruthlessly and proofread

- Leave time to read through your report
- Clear and simple sentence convey your ideas more effectively
    - o Cut out any unnecessary descriptions
    - o Get to the point: shorten any needlessly long sentences, especially in introductory sentences
    - o Example: "This report will concern itself primarily with the important issue of the noise level on campus" is better as "This report concerns the noise level on campus"
- Use technical terms accurately and make sure you fully understand what they mean
- Avoid adding in unnecessary jargon just to sound more 'academic'

For more information on report writing, see the interactive resources on our website:

go.qub.ac.uk/ReportWriting