



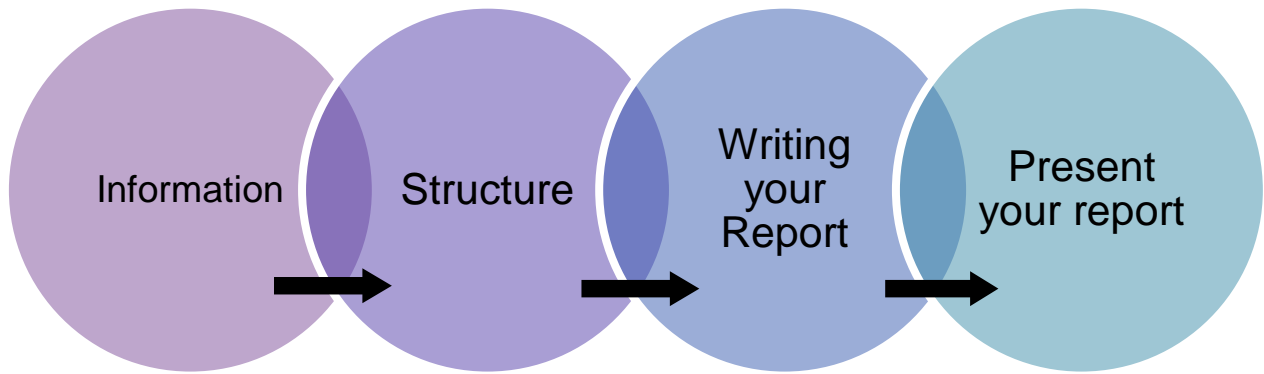
Guide for Writing a Business Report

Alexander College Writing & Learning Centre

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WHAT IS A BUSINESS REPORT?

A business report presents relevant information about an organization to aid in decision making. Depending on the decision being made, this report may include information about the financial situation of the company, the organizational structure, the marketing strategy, and so on. No matter what material must be discussed, you can use the same approach to write a successful business report.

Preparing to Write a Business Report

1. Look at the requirements of the assignment.

- Make sure you understand what each question is asking for – are you supposed to analyze a situation or issue? Make a recommendation?
- If anything is unclear, talk to your instructor or the Writing Centre specialists.

2. Read the case study and other materials supplied.

Make sure you have a clear understanding of the information in these materials. For instance,

- Are the results shown in the financial statements clear?
- Does the organizational structure make sense?
- Do you understand the relationships between the relevant employees/departments/companies?
- Do the events explained in these materials make sense?

If anything is unclear, talk to your instructor or the Writing Centre specialists.

3. Review the materials.

After becoming familiar with the assignment questions and the other materials, it's a good idea to re-read these materials a few times. You should be able to develop some initial ideas that will help you answer each question. While doing this, identify the key points of the case study.

Make note of:

- The main people involved, their relationships with each other
- The events that have happened in the materials provided
- Any other information that is important to the case study

Use concepts learned in class to explain these points from the materials. Theories are useful for analyzing topics in the materials and gaining a better understanding of the situations and issues presented.

For instance,

- Is there a theory you can use to explain the connection between certain points in the case study and employees' behaviour on the job?
- Can you use a concept to demonstrate the effectiveness of your recommendation?
- Are there equations or ratios you could use to help determine the financial standing of the company?

Keep track of where you found any information in your textbook, project materials, and course notes so it can be properly cited in your final report.

If you are writing a report based on a case study of an organization, there are additional steps you can take to gain a deeper understanding of the provided materials. These questions are included in the Appendix to this report.

5. Begin your outline.

An outline takes the key points and concepts that you identified in the previous step and organizes them to follow the final format of the report. At this stage, you start using your ideas to answer the assignment questions and see the flow of the ideas you are presenting. This will help you to order information in a logical way and avoid unnecessarily repeating information in the report.

In general, each assignment question will require:

- a topic sentence,
- evidence from the provided materials, and
- application of theory.

When creating an outline of your responses to each assignment question, make sure to include point-form notes for these three criteria.

In addition to answering the assignment questions, your business report must have a certain structure (which is discussed in the next section). Your outline will include point-form notes about the ideas that you want to discuss in these sections as well.

Structure of a Business Report

A business report should contain the following:

- Executive summary/abstract
- Introduction
- Main body
- Conclusion
- Optional: appendices
- References

Abstract/Executive Summary:

The executive summary contains a brief overview of everything that will be discussed in the report – the company background, the issues it is facing, and your recommendations for resolving these issues.

Because of this, the executive summary is usually the last part of the business report to be written. This section should be about a page long, or just under a page long.

Introduction:

This section gives some more background on the company. Most of these points will come from the case study or other materials given to you, so it will mostly be a summary of the information in these materials.

Some common points to include in your introduction:

- A brief introduction to the project questions or main topic areas.
- What industry is the company in?
- Where are they located?
- What products or services do they offer?
- What are some important characteristics of the organization?
- What recent events occurring in the company have been mentioned by the materials?

Main Body of Report:

This section is where you answer the assignment questions. For each question,

- I. Construct a clear topic sentence describing the main idea of your answer.
 - The topic sentence should be a concise answer to the assignment question. It explains the main idea of your answer without yet going into any supporting details.
 - For example, “The main cause of the company’s high turnover is the poor communication between the different levels of management.”
- II. Use evidence from the case study – what points from the case study support your answer? Include these as examples in your report, and remember to include a citation for them.
- III. Apply theory – use concepts learned in class to explain the events in the provided materials. Again, when explaining and applying these theories, remember to cite them from the original source.

Conclusion:

Briefly summarize the main ideas covered in your report. This is similar to the abstract, in that it provides a review of everything you have discussed in your report – a description of the company, the problems they are facing, and your solutions to these problems. It goes into a bit more detail about your answers to the assignment questions than the abstract does, so this section is normally about a page long.

(Optional) Appendices:

You may include an appendix in your business report if necessary. The appendix normally includes information or visuals that are helpful to readers of the report, but are not essential to its understanding.

For a case study report, it may be useful to move all visuals (e.g., graphs or organizational structure diagrams) to the appendix. All materials included in the appendix must be referenced in the report itself.

- If you are taking these visuals from a textbook or some other material, you must cite these images as well.

References:

List all resources used in your report in the appropriate citation style.

A Business Report outline worksheet is available in the Writing and Learning Centre at both campuses, as well as on the Writing Centre’s website.

Writing the Report

With your outline completed, you are now ready to write your report. Some things to keep in mind when you are writing:

- Regularly look back at your topic statement, and make sure that what you are explaining clearly and directly relates to that topic statement. Ensure that the reader of your report will easily understand the connection as well.
- Write your report as if your reader knows nothing about the information in the case study. Clearly explain the events that you are intending to analyze before starting your analysis.
- When applying theory, you do not need to explain all the details of that theory. However, make sure to apply it in a way that demonstrates your understanding of it. This may involve explaining one aspect of the theory, or showing the connection between that aspect and the information from the materials.
- Even though the materials need to be explained fully, make sure your writing is as concise as possible. If you find you are referring continually to a theory or events in the case study, you do not need to re-explain all the details of them again every time you discuss them in the paper.
- Use formal language in a business report. Do not use slang or hyperbole in your writing.
- Anytime you discuss an event from the case study or explain a theory from the textbook, it must be cited (even if you are not directly quoting from the source). Consult with the librarians or Writing Centre specialists for help with citations.
 - The Writing & Learning Centre has Quick Style Guides for all the major citation styles
 - Citations Workshops are also available.
- When working in a team:
 - It is common for team members to split up the assignment questions and work on them independently before putting them together into the final report. If you do this, make sure to have other team members read through your material – they may have suggestions about how to improve or expand upon it, and it also ensures that everyone in the team is on the same page when it comes to the main points of the report (e.g., everyone is agreeing on what the main problems and recommendations are).
 - After putting together all the pieces of the report, have one or more team members read through and edit the entire report so that it sounds like “one voice” – similar writing style throughout the paper, no unnecessary repetition of points from the materials, the same conclusions for the main problems or recommendations, and so on.

Presenting the Report

Commonly, when writing a business report, you must present your findings to an audience.

Some things to remember:

- Your presentation can follow the same format as your business report, but don't just read every line of your report. Instead, make note of the key points in each section, and focus on presenting those clearly to the audience.

- Your PowerPoint should only have the key points of your report on it. What are the main ideas that you will be discussing? Try to summarize these ideas into just a few words, and put these bullet points in your presentation.
- Even if your audience has read the materials, it's important to explain any important events or details in your presentation. This makes it easier for listeners to understand the connection between the materials and the points you are making.
- Once you know what you want to say in your presentation, practice saying it out loud. Does it make sense? Would it be clear to a listener who has not read your report? Does it flow well? Practicing will also make you more comfortable with what you are going to say, so you won't have to look at your notes as often.
- During your presentation, speak slowly and clearly. If you speak too quickly, audience members won't be able to keep track and absorb the information you are giving them.
- You can have notes to refer to during your presentation, but don't rely on them completely. Know what you want to say, and only use your notes if you need a reminder of the next topic, or of the points you want to cover.
- **For more information on delivering a successful presentation, see our “Presentations Do's & Don'ts” Guidelines which may be downloaded from *Commerce Tools* or *Writing Tools* on the Writing & Learning Centre's web pages.**

Appendix: Preparing to Write a Case Study Report

In a case study report, you are often asked to identify the main problem or problems within an organization and offer suggestions on how to solve these issues. Compiling the following information can help you gain a full understanding of the situation faced by the organization, and develop the ideas needed to start answering the assignment questions.

i. State the main problem(s) in the organization.

After looking at all the key points of the case study, what is the main problem (or problems) the company is facing? Each issue can generally be explained in just one or two sentences.

- E.g., “There is very low job satisfaction among employees.” Or, “The main problem within the organization is the high turnover of management.”

ii. Determine the factors that are causing the problem(s) to occur.

To explain these factors, it is useful to give supporting examples from the case study and to apply concepts that you have learned in class.

- Find examples from the materials that back up your argument, then use theories to analyze these events.
- Make a note of where you found this information (both from the case study and from your textbook), because you will have to cite it in your final report.

iii. Give potential solutions to the problem(s).

What are some ways to solve these problems? List a number of alternatives.

- All of the alternatives you provide should be applicable to all (or most) problems you have identified. In other words, do not come up with individual solutions to each individual problem. Instead, look at a number of solutions that can each solve all the problems.
- For each of these alternatives, it is useful to consider the consequences of implementing them. What are the benefits of implementing each alternative, and what are some potentially negative consequences of choosing this alternative?

iv. Choose the best solution.

Of all your alternatives, which is the best? Why?

- Often the best alternative is the one with the fewest (or least serious) negative consequences or the one where these are most easily overcome.
- Explain in detail how this solution will resolve the organization's issues. Apply course concepts to these reasons to further explain why it's the most effective alternative.
- Again, keep track of where you found this information so it can be properly cited in your final report.

v. Create an action plan.

Detail as specifically as possible how this solution will be implemented.

- When will each portion of the solution be introduced?
- How will the negative consequences, if any, be overcome?
- Give a timeframe for introducing all aspects of the chosen solution – are there some elements that can be implemented immediately? Are there some that need to be introduced in stages?

Following these steps will give you a thorough understanding of the case study, and help you to develop your answers for the assignment questions when writing your report. Not all of this material will be used in your final report – make sure when writing your report that you are answering the assignment questions directly.

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