Report Writing: an introduction
By the end of this presentation you should know...

• how a report differs from an essay;
• how to plan a report;
• how to structure and lay out your report;
• how to organise your information.
What is a report?

Fundamentally it is a written record of a process or investigation, that is...

"an evaluative account or summary of the results of an investigation, or of any matter on which information is required"

(Oxford English Dictionary)

A good report effectively communicates information to an intended audience.
What is a report?

A report is different from an essay because...

• it's informative, not argumentative;
• it makes use of headings and sub-sections;
• it should be concise;
• it's illustrated by figures, tables and graphs;
• it offers recommendations for action.
Stages of report writing

1. Establish terms of reference
2. Collect information
3. Organise and structure
4. Write
5. Edit and revise
Terms of reference

A guiding statement used to define the scope of your investigation. They explain why you are writing the report and help to determine the overall structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Audience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why are you writing the report?</td>
<td>Who will read the report?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the report about?</td>
<td>How will they read the report?</td>
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Collect information

The gathering information stage consists of two separate phases:

1. Gather background information, that is, anything academically relevant which contextualises your study.
2. Undertake your study or investigate using appropriate methodology.
Put the elements of a report in the right order.

Think about what you would put in each section.
## Structure

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<td>Introduction</td>
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<table>
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<th>Main body</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Results</td>
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<td>Discussion</td>
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<th>End</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
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<td>References</td>
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<td>Appendices</td>
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</table>

"Tell them what you are going to say, say it, then tell them you said it".  *Bowden* (1996, pg.18)
Abstract/Summary

A short paragraph which summarises the main content of the report.

It needs to be **concise** but **informative**.

Common practice to write this after you've written the report.
Introduction

Gives context to your study and should include:

• terms of reference
• clear aims and objectives
• an outline of the report but not any findings
• background information to "set the scene"

Larger reports may break this section into several parts.
The largest section of the report which communicates the detail of your study. It needs to include:

**Methodology:** How you are going to carry out the investigation. Detail the methods used.

**Results:** The findings of the investigation, using figures and graphs where needed.

**Discussion:** What these results mean in the context of the background information.
Conclusions

A summary of the main points which clearly relate back to any stated aims and objectives.

Do not include any new information.

Offer any recommendations for further development. These should be realistic and in line with your findings.
Appendices

Documentary evidence to support the main report content.

- Will the reader need to know this?
  - No: Do not include in the report
  - Yes: Will they need to know it to follow the discussion in the main body?
    - No: Will it be referred to several times?
      - No: Put in the appendix
      - Yes: Include in the main body
    - Yes: Include in the main body

(Bowden, 1996, pg.26)
Activity 2

Using the title page of this report, identify all of the sections and parts.

Is there anything you could add to the report to improve it?
Write

"A report aims to inform as clearly and succinctly as possible. It should be easy to read and look professional."

(www.learnhigher.ac.uk)

Do:

• check whether you should use the 'passive' or 'active' voice (e.g. use "It is recommended" or "I recommend");
• use technical terms (but define them clearly);
• make sure your argument / discussion is logical;
• write critically, evaluating the work of others as well as your own study;
• make sure your discussion is concise and consistent.
Write

Don't:

• use long sentences;
• use long paragraphs;
• include more than one theme per paragraph;
• use informality, jargon or clichés (e.g. "...the opportunity was a double-edged sword.");
• assume the reader knows what you mean - write clearly and directly.
Proper division of your work into sections and subsections makes the structure clear and the document easy to follow:

- 1.0 Introduction
  - 1.1 Background
    - 1.11 Organisation history
    - 1.12 Recognising a need for change
  - 1.2 Aims and Objectives
- 2.0 Methodology
  etc.
Layout

Use figures, graphs and tables only if they are meaningful. Emphasise the relevance of these figures.

Label and number each figure and refer to this in the text (e.g. Figure 1. A line chart of the number of visitors...).

Include a table of figures in your table of contents.
Referencing

Include a reference to every other piece of work you have mentioned or have taken information from.

*e.g.* Referencing is an essential part of academic writing and can help to reduce accusations of plagiarism (Pears and Shields, 2010).

*or*

Pears and Shield (2010) emphasise the importance of referencing in reducing accusations of plagiarism.

Be consistent and try using a reference manager to organise your information.
Summary

Three things to remember:

1. Establish terms of reference and use these as the basis for your report.

2. Be concise and to the point but make sure you include everything relevant.

3. Include references.
Useful resources

Websites:
Learn Higher: http://learnhigher.ac.uk
Higher Education Academy: http://lncn.eu/bep8

Books: