

FOR **Learning** **Work** SERIES

**Writing
BETTER
REPORTS**

Booklet

5



Name: _____

Writing BETTER REPORTS

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Introduction

Information and skills you will acquire

Writing Better Reports is one of a valuable and user-friendly new series of easy-to-read booklets created specially to help you develop at work. The materials have been created from actual experience in workplace training. Experts from Workbase Training and the Campaign for Learning have pooled their knowledge and experience to involve you in learning new skills and building on those you already have. The booklet is divided into clear *sections*, containing specially devised *activities* and a *mini project*, to allow you to practise as you learn.

Writing Better Reports will enable you to:

- Plan a report.
- Generate ideas.
- Use a suitable layout.
- Use the correct words.
- Edit and proof-read a report.
- You may want to work your way through the booklet from start to finish or focus on an area of interest.
- Once you have completed the questionnaire on page 4 you will be able to see clearly which topics you need most help with, and which areas you can safely leave out.
- The questionnaire will also allow you to create your own learning plan, for which an example and space is provided on page 5.
- You may want to ask your supervisor or another colleague for their views on the areas you could work on, or for help with the activities in the booklet.
- As you may want to use the booklet for future reference, you may want to write the answers out in rough first and then write them in the booklet.

Getting the most out of this booklet

Questionnaire

This questionnaire is to enable you to think about what report writing skills you need most help with.

Tick boxes as appropriate

What do you need most help with?

SECTION 1: Identifying different types of reports

Selecting a layout for a basic report

SECTION 2: Generating ideas for a report

SECTION 3: Preparing and planning a report

SECTION 4: Drafting a report

Editing and proof-reading a report

How often do you need this information/do this in your job?				How confident do you feel?		
A	B	C	D	1	2	3
not at all	not very often	fairly often	frequently	not at all	fairly	very

The most important areas for you to concentrate on are those which you have marked B, C, D, and 1 or 2.

Section I

IDENTIFYING TYPES OF REPORTS AND BASIC REPORT STRUCTURE

The purpose of reports

We write to communicate an idea or a piece of information to another person or other people. A report is a piece of writing which has a specific purpose. Generally speaking, there are four main reasons or purposes for writing a report. These are:

- to record information
For example, a report which provides a record of an accident at work.
- to influence decision making
For example, a report which sets out the problems with an old computer system and proposes that money should be invested in a new system.
- to initiate action
For example, a report proposing that car park charges should be increased.
- to persuade people to do something.
For example, a report on traffic conditions which demonstrates the advantages of cycling to work instead of going by car.

Reports vary in length, style and layout. For example, you might quickly handwrite a short report about what you saw at an accident that has just happened. Alternatively, you might write a lengthy formal report after carrying out an investigation which lasted several weeks.

Reading reports

We all read reports of different types, whether it is a report in a newspaper or magazine or a report about an accident at work, for example. Thinking about what helps you to understand other people's reports, and what doesn't help you, will guide you in your own writing.

Activity I

Think of different reports you have read recently (e.g. a committee report, a colleague's report, an accident report).

What do you find difficult or unhelpful when you read other people's reports?

What helps you to understand other people's reports?

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 19.

Structure for a basic report

Reports are a way of communicating information using a particular format or structure. The format varies, depending on the type of report and its purpose. For most purposes, the following structure provides the best way of presenting the information in a report.

1. Introduction

This should explain briefly to your readers what you are going to write about (the topic) and why you are writing the report (the purpose).

2. Main points

This is where you present your findings/information and any conclusions you draw from them. Your information should be set out in a logical order, such as sequence of time or order of importance.

3. Conclusion

This is a brief summary of your main points. Nothing new should appear at this stage.

4. Recommendations

These should lead directly from your conclusion. If there is more than one recommendation, they should be listed separately, so that they can be considered individually rather than being accepted or rejected as a whole.

5. Appendices

This is where you put any other information, e.g. graphs, facts or tables, which relates to or enlarges on the subjects covered by the report, but is not needed to understand the main focus of the report. Each appendix is given a number or letter and is referred to by this title (e.g. you would say 'see Appendix A').

Note: Sometimes it may be helpful to start the report with a summary.

Activity 2

You work for a local council and have to write a report for your supervisor, Hayley Walters, about your team's policy on building new bus shelters. The report will be circulated to councillors and will also be available to interested members of the public.

You have the following information:

Bus shelters are not built on request.
Headteachers have to make a request, giving details of pupil numbers, for school bus shelters.
Visits have to be made to non-school sites for surveys to take place.
Shelters are built on a priority basis only.
No area has priority over other areas.
Priority is based on bus-stop usage.
Distance from other bus shelters is taken into account.
People are asked to contact the Technical Officer, Zarim Singh, on 0800 45689 if they have any queries or feel that their bus stop is used sufficiently to come within the policy.

On a separate sheet of paper, draft an outline for a report, using the format below, based on this information.

Introduction
Main points
Conclusion
Recommendations

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 19.

To know what to put in each section refer to 'Structure for a basic report' above.

Key Learning Points

- Reports are written for various reasons, of which the main ones are:
 - to record information
 - to influence decision making
 - to initiate action
 - to persuade people to do something.
- Reports may vary in length, style and layout.
- A report is easier for the reader to understand if it follows a simple structure based on a clear beginning (introduction), a middle (containing relevant facts in order) and an end (a summary of what you have said).
- Even a short report should follow this structure. This makes it easier for you to organise your information and clearer for the readers to understand.