

Lecture 1

1.1 What is a report?

A report is a structured form of writing which involves identification of a problem, its detailed examination and an organized provision of all the results and discussions followed by some suggestions and recommendations.

1.1.1 Characteristics of a Report

- A report is to be structured with the use of headings and subheadings in order to communicate levels of importance. Main headings are differentiated from sub-headings by the use of bold and big font so that a hierarchy is created on a visual level for the readers.
- A report should be comprised of sections which can stand independently when it comes to the comprehension of these sections without referring to the other sections. For example, section of Literature Review is complete on its own and presents a well-rounded study of all the relevant researches conducted till the time of the report.
- A report is a form of impartial communication based on facts and figures to maintain objectivity in language. Personal opinion and subjective language is avoided while composing a report.

1.1.2 Expectations

First, a report is based on a problem or hypothesis for which a solution has to be provided. This has to be highlighted as the topic of a report. Then you compose your synopsis/proposal which lays out the basic structure of your report. After your proposal is accepted, you have a clear purpose, research questions, population and sample to include in your write-up.

Second, a report has a clearly defined audience (client, manager, etc). You identify their background knowledge of the subject and their expectations from the report before you start composing it.

Third, a report is given a proper structure and format with the use of headings and subheadings. The information has to be provided with the use of objective language instead of being personal or subjective. That is, the author must avoid the use of first person singular and plural.

Fourth, a good report is based on good research and analysis. This adds credibility and authenticity to the results and makes a successful and target-oriented report.

1.1.3 General Purpose of Writing a Report

A report is generally composed for the following three reasons:

- **To inform:** A report is used to provide impartial and authentic information about an event, problem or project
- **To persuade:** A report analyzes data and presents findings to support a specific position/hypothesis so that the audience is persuaded to believe in that.
- **To influence:** A persuasive report influences the audience to take some action based on the findings and recommendations.

- **To initiate:** When the audience takes the action recommended by the report, a perspective and behavior shift is initiated which becomes the harbinger of change in the society. For example, a report on the adverse effects of using plastic bags may lead to their suspension in a certain community.

1.1.4 Significance of a Report

A report is used to maintain a written account of all the tasks and activities being performed within an organization. Furthermore, a report also acts as a source of written communication within an organization in a hierarchical manner. It can be upward communication starting from employee moving towards the employer or vice versa i.e. downward communication. Likewise, it can be a source of parallel communication i.e. employee to employee (peer-to-peer communication).

1.1.5 Relevance of a Report

A report acts as a mean of internal communication within an organization. It facilitates project planning and decision-making process by disclosing new information through the analysis of authentic data. Thus, it adds information in the existing body of knowledge and becomes a channel of disseminating information among all the employees of an organization.

1.2 Report Attributes

- A report is a methodical, well-planned document which outlines and evaluates a subject or problem.
- Essentially, a report is a short, sharp and concise document which is written for a particular purpose and audience.
- It basically analyzes a situation or problem, often making recommendations for future actions.
- It is a factual paper and needs to be clear and well-structured.

1.3 Features of a Well-Written Report

A report reflects your clarity of thought. It elaborates the fact that your knowledge is comprehensive and you have provided information in a manner which is self-explanatory. The information should not only be comprehensive but also brief. In other words, maximum information is provided with a minimum use of words. The overall structure of a well-written report is presentable and legible.

1.4 Report vs. Essay

A report can be compared with an essay as these two formats of writing have certain similarities and differences.

1.4.1 Similarities

Common features of these two formats are as follows:

- An introductory section
- A detailed body
- A conclusive section
- Analytical thinking

- Formal style;
- Careful proofreading, and
- Neat presentation.

1.4.2 Differences

The differences between a report and an essay are as follows:

1. A report is based on the provision of information; whereas in an essay the basic idea is to argue for a particular topic.
2. Factual information is meant to be scanned quickly by the reader in a report since a report is well-structured by the use of numbered headings and subheadings. This is absent in an essay as a reader has to go through the essay completely to understand the subject matter.
3. A report is a technical document and uses simple sentence structure as compare to an essay which may use complex/compound sentence structure.
4. A report also includes tables, graphs and other illustrations whereas an essay is simply a collection of words. If needed, informal figures are included.
5. A report begins with a short abstract also known as the executive summary whereas the outline of an essay is presented in the introductory paragraph.
6. A report provides suggestions and recommendations at the end of a detailed analysis and discussion of results whereas an essay concludes by reviewing the arguments and does not always provide recommendations and suggestions.