Written assignments

Some key features of academic reports

Please note! This handout describes and models general features of academic reports. It is very likely that in your specific discipline only some of these features will apply – and there may be other requirements not included here. Departmental requirements for reports especially vary widely, so please do check your course or unit handbook, or ask a subject tutor or lecturer.

Reports, along with essays, are one of the most common types of written assignment on university courses. (For more on the differences between reports and essays please see the handout Reports and essays: key differences.)

There is no absolutely right way to structure a report – the structure depends on the purpose. In general, however, academic reports feature some of the following sections:

1 Title page

2 Author declaration

This is a simple form, usually available from your department or faculty office, which you have to sign and include with any report (or indeed essay) written for your course. It confirms formally that the assignment submitted is entirely your own work.

3 Abstract (sometimes called Executive Summary)

An abstract is a **short (often around 150 words in length) summary of the whole report.** It should therefore be written last. Unlike a conclusion, the abstract needs to include a brief overview of all the stages of the report, not just the results. (One purpose of an abstract is to give just enough information to enable a prospective reader to judge whether they need to read the full report.)

Hint: If you are new to writing abstracts, one approach is to write, in order, one or two sentences to represent each of the sections of your report. Have a look at abstracts or executive summaries in reports in the Library or on the Internet to get an idea of the style in which they are generally written.

4 Acknowledgements

This is a separate page acknowledging the support of those people who have contributed to the assignment. An acknowledgements page is normally necessary only in major reports.

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