



Report structure

We can describe the structure of a report in a similar way to that of an essay: introduction, body, and conclusion. However, since the **purpose** of a report is different from the purpose of an essay, the introduction, body, and conclusion of a report will also have a slightly different purpose and will look different from the sections of an essay.

You may also be asked to include specific elements in your report, such as a title page, table of contents, glossary, executive summary, recommendations, or appendices. The following table shows the possible elements of a report in the order they would usually occur.

The essential elements (introduction, body, conclusion, and reference list) are shown in red and bold in the table on the next page. The other elements are optional.

If you are asked to include any of the optional elements in your report, find where they occur relative to the introduction, body, and conclusion and insert them in the correct place. Always check what is required in a report before you begin, as different people have different expectations. Ask your tutor or manager, or check if a report template has been provided.

Formatting

A report should be as easy to read as possible, so you need to take some care with how you present it on the page. Follow any formatting guidelines given in your Subject Outline or by your lecturer/tutor, and also keep the following points in mind:

- Keep section headings short and informative
- Make sure section headings stand out so the reader can easily skim the report to find the information they most want to know
- Leave at least one line of white space between sections and elements
- Number all the pages

References

- Brick, J. (2011). *Academic Culture: A student's guide to studying at university* (2nd ed.). South Yarra, VIC: Macmillan.
- Western Sydney University. (n.d.) 'Critical Practice: Perspectives from students and lecturers in Engineering' in *Field of Study: Engineering*.

Element	Explanation
Title page	Unit code and title, tutor's name, report title and purpose, your name and student number. Check your Subject Outline to find out what information you need to include here.
Table of contents	A list of sections and subsections indicating which page each section begins on (usually only needed for longer reports of 10 pages or more). Each section and subsection is numbered in a cascading way, e.g. Section 2 has three subsections, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3. Use a numbered list in your word processing program to create the Table of Contents.
List of abbreviations and/or glossary	A list of any abbreviations, acronyms or technical terms you use in your report. This should be on a separate page in your report.
Executive summary	A brief overview of the whole report that stands alone and does not refer to the report the way an abstract would. The purpose of the executive summary is so a reader who doesn't have time to read the whole report can find all the important information 'at a glance'. You should summarise each section of the report in one or two sentences, with any recommendations often given in full (see Brick 2011, p. 165 for an example). Check your assignment instructions for word length.
Introduction	Introduces the topic and its background and significance, identifies the specific problem within that topic area that you are investigating, previews the sections of the report, and defines any important terms used.
Body	Treatment of the problem is divided up into different aspects (e.g. definition of the problem, analysis of its features, stages, and/or causes, and proposals for different ways of approaching or managing the problem or situation)
Conclusion	Summarises the report's main points. There is no new information here, since each idea or piece of information should already have been introduced in the body of the report.
Recommendations	Presents specific suggestions for action that arise from the analysis and findings of the report.
Bibliography or reference list	Any sources you have referred to should be listed here in alphabetical order. Use the referencing system indicated in your Subject Online.
Appendices (singular: appendix; plural: appendices)	If you have any large tables, figures, or other material that is too long for your report but is necessary for the reader to be able to refer to while reading your report, you should include these as appendices at the end of the report. Each one should be numbered and given a title to tell the reader what it contains. They should be included in the Table of Contents as well.

Adapted from Brick (2011, pp. 162-166).

Example Introduction

Report task: identify the major stormwater issues facing Sydney catchments, examine how they affect rivers, streams and waterways, and cite specific examples of how (SMP) are being employed to improve the quality of runoff. (3rd year Engineering)

Structural element	Example	Comments
Numbered section heading	1. Introduction	Identifies the section of the report, allowing for skim reading. Use Headings styles in Word.
General statement	The term stormwater is defined as the water that flows into drains and waterways after rainfall in urban areas.	Identifies the topic, in this case by defining the term.
Background information	Rainwater that cannot infiltrate into the soil is directed into stormwater drains, which comprise of a series of pipes, detention storages and open channels that flow into streams, creeks, rivers and bays. The diagram below shows how the flow occurs from rainfall to urban runoff and pollution processes.	Elaborates on the topic of stormwater, describing what happens to stormwater in more detail.
Diagram label	Fig 1. Flow diagram of urban stormwater runoff and pollution processes	Gives the diagram, figure or table a brief caption so the reader knows what they're supposed to see in it.
Diagram/figure	[Figure 1]	Offers extra clarity to point made.
Identification of problem	The major concern facing stormwater flow in Sydney is the pollution of urban runoff.	Identifies problem clearly: pollution of urban runoff
Technical terms and their definitions included in the explanation of the problem	Stormwater pollution comes from point and non-point sources. Point sources are those in which polluted water is discharged at a single location such as a factory or sewerage treatment plant. Non-point sources are those in which water pollution is generated from a large area and flows into the drainage system at more than one point. Urban development has a major impact on the type of pollution collected in stormwater flow.	The technical terms used here are defined because in this report, it's important to recognise the difference between them.
Further specification of problem	The impact on the environment ranges from issues of air pollution, water quality, increased surface runoff and impacts on stream morphology from changes in stream flow.	Further specifies the problem: environmental impact
Technical terms introduced without definition		The technical terms used here are introduced without definition - they are probably terms used routinely in the unit for which this assignment was written, so they don't need to be defined here.
Report preview	The aims and objective of this report are to identify the major stormwater issues facing Sydney catchments, examine how they affect rivers, streams and waterways, and cite specific examples of how (SMP) are being employed to improve the quality of runoff.	Outlines the things that will be covered in the report.

Example adapted from Western Sydney University (n.d.).