



## Writing reports

So, you need to write a report. Maybe you've never done one before, or maybe you want to get better at writing them.

### Why should I write reports?

A report is a document with a purpose. It helps communicate information to a reader or readers efficiently due to the headings and predictable structure.

You write a report to describe, analyse, and/or evaluate a situation or problem. You may also recommend actions based on your analysis.

Reports may also be described as persuasive, because you want people to use the information and recommendations to make their decisions. Because good decisions rely on accurate information and reliable analysis, you must demonstrate that your report is accurate and reliable, and that your recommendations are justified.

Because people use reports for making decisions, they are one of the most common types of documents in many workplaces. For example, a report may analyse the financial status of a company, or a problem in a building project. To learn more about purposes of reports, see the [Report purpose](#) guide.

### What's in a report?

Reports can vary depending on their purpose and context, but they have these important features in common:

1. A structure that makes it easy to find specific information
2. Use of visual presentation of data, including images, tables, diagrams, and charts
3. Use of numbered lists and dot-points where appropriate
4. Formal language, often technical. To learn more, see the [Tone/register](#) guide.
5. Use of referenced sources where relevant

The first three of these report features make them easy to tell apart from essays.

The table below shows essential report elements. Reports may contain other, optional elements, such as Table of Contents, Appendix, and others. For a more complete description of report elements, see the [Report structure](#) guide.

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## Essential Report Elements

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Report Element	Explanation
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.
Bibliography or reference list	Any sources you have referred to should be listed here in alphabetical order. Use the referencing system indicated in your Learning Guide.

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

## Types of reports

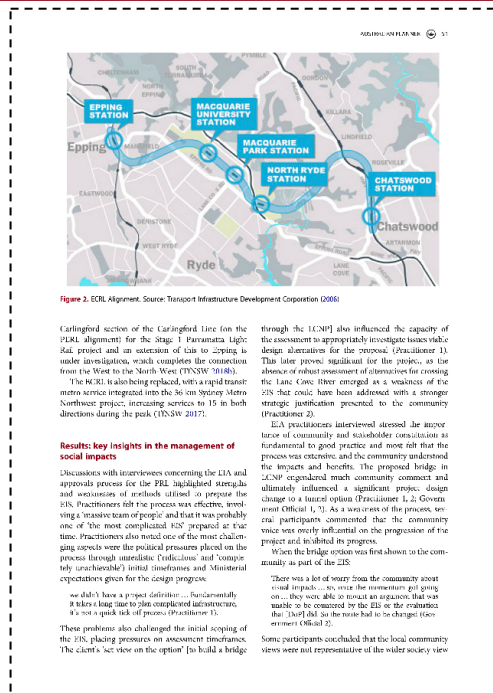
When writing a report, think about its purpose, audience and context. These factors will influence the type of report, the writing style and the structure. For example, a report about a scientific experiment will look different from a report about a business case study.

When you write a report at uni, your assignment information will usually tell you what kind of report to write and its structure, to assist your learning. In your future workplace, however, your employer may expect you know what type of report is appropriate and how to structure it.

What a report looks like and its details such as structure and writing style depends on its purpose, audience and context. These example pages from two reports both have headings and figures (in this case, maps) but look very different.

## Two Example Report Pages

### Research Report Published In Academic Journal



### Annual Report Published By Parramatta Local Council



#### Results: key insights in the management of social impacts

Discussions with interviewees concerning the EIA and approvals process for the PRL highlighted strengths and weaknesses of methods utilised to prepare the EIS. Practitioners felt the process was effective, involving a 'massive team of people' and that it was probably one of 'the most complicated EIS' prepared at that time. Practitioners also noted one of the most challenging aspects were the political pressures placed on the process through unrealistic ('ridiculous' and 'completely unachievable') initial timeframes and Ministerial expectations given for the design progress:

we didn't have a project definition ... Fundamentally it takes a long time to plan complicated infrastructure, it's not a quick tick off process (Practitioner 1).

These problems also challenged the initial scoping of the EIS, placing pressures on assessment timeframes. The client's 'set view on the option' [to build a bridge

#### City of Parramatta is transforming.

Population growth, new housing, jobs and infrastructure are changing the area from a suburban centre into Sydney's Central City: the centre of services, infrastructure and employment for Western Sydney.

City of Parramatta is home to many unique neighbourhoods, which have their own distinct demographic qualities, from Winston Hills to Westmead to Wentworth Point.

#### According to the latest Census data we:



#### Academic audience

Formal, technical language

(e.g., acronyms that the reader needs to know)

Figures (images) for information only

Figures (images, charts) and tables labelled (identifying number and text)

#### Community audience

Formal, non-technical language

(e.g., no prior knowledge needed to read it)

Images for visual appeal as well as information

Not all figures and tables are labelled

#### References

- City of Parramatta Annual Report 2017-18 2018, viewed 13 July 2019, <[https://www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/sites/council/files/2018-12/COP\\_Annual%20Report\\_combined\\_FA.pdf](https://www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/sites/council/files/2018-12/COP_Annual%20Report_combined_FA.pdf)>.
- Mottee, L K & Howitt, R 2018, 'Follow-up and social impact assessment (SIA) in urban transport-infrastructure projects: insights from the parramatta rail link', *Australian Planner*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 46-56, viewed 13 July 2019, CAUL Taylor & Francis Package 2019 database, DOI 10.1080/07293682.2018.1506496.

The reports you write at university are likely to be more similar to the example research report than the community report. However, always check your assessment information to be sure of the expectations for your report.

### Two common report types at university

Two common report types you may do at university are research reports and case study reports. The information below is a general guide only. Always check your assessment information to be sure about what you need to do for your report.

**TIP:** Have a look at other reports in your discipline with a similar purpose to yours to see what is usual in your discipline for report structure and content. ALWAYS follow the guidance provided in your assignment instructions.

### Research report

You write a research report to communicate about a research project you have completed by doing fieldwork or experiments. Research report structures can vary according to discipline. For example, a scientific research report usually has standardised body headings, while in the humanities, there is more variety in the headings and structure. A typical example of each structure is below.

A research proposal is generally similar in structure to a research report, except that you are making an argument for why you should do the research, and reporting on how you will do it. You also won't have any sections that report on what you found by doing the research.

Another form of research report is 'research by reading'. In this case, you are reporting on research you did by reading about a topic instead of by doing fieldwork or experiments.

### Two Example Research Report Structures

Scientific Research Report (typical)		Humanities Research Report (variable)	
Title		Title	
Abstract		Abstract	
Introduction		Introduction	
Method		[Theme 1]	No strict rules about body structure or headings. Include evidence and data, analysis, and discussion. Often organised according to themes found in the research
Results	Method, Results, Discussion are typical body elements of a scientific research report.	[Theme 2]	
Discussion		[Theme 3]	
Conclusion		Conclusion	
References		References	
Appendices		Appendices	

### Case study report

When you are asked to write a case study report, you will typically be expected to use theory you are learning to analyse a 'case' in the real world. Disciplines that use case studies include nursing, business, education, engineering, and social or natural sciences.

Examples of possible cases include a specific real or hypothetical patient, group of people, organisation, event, or place.

Two typical case study types are:

- **Problem-solving.** Used to investigate a problem in a specific case, and recommend a solution.
- **Descriptive.** Used to understand a specific case better, for example, what happened and why.

For all case studies, you analyse the situation by using the relevant theory or theories you have been learning.

To learn more about the purpose of case studies and see two case study assignment examples, see [Case study purpose](#).

Case study structure is generally similar to the structure of other research reports. A difference is that in the introduction, you introduce the reader to the case. Check your assignment information for guidance on how to structure your case study report, and what to include. For more information, see [Case study structure](#).

### How can I get started on my report?

6. Write down the question/s, issue/s or problem/s you are responding to with your report. A clear, concise statement or question will help you to focus your work.
7. Write down who is going to read the report (the audience). At university, you may have two audiences: the imaginary audience for your report, such as people in an organisation, PLUS the person marking the report.
8. Check your assessment guide and any other information to see what needs to be included and any suggested headings
9. Use the information you have collected to start your work. You can create an early structure and begin drafting content.

**TIP:** As you do your research, you will find you need to make changes to your draft. However, having an early draft helps guide you. It's always easier to edit an existing draft than to create a report from nothing at the last minute.

### Example report

On the following page you will find an example report. Note that this is a very short text, and real reports are generally longer. The sections included in this example report are the essential sections as described in the Essential Report Elements table on page 1.

The structure of this report is that of a typical scientific research report. The writing style is formal and technical. The writer has used HEADINGS for all sections, to make it easy for the reader to navigate to the information they want.

## Report example, with explanations

### Report

#### Gnome foods palatable to humans

##### Introduction

Eating together can benefit social groups and clubs, because it may increase social bonds (Dunbar, 2017) and contribute to organisational culture (Plester, 2015). For a new social club, the Gnome Appreciation Society, eating foods that gnomes eat reflects club values of appreciating gnomes. The aim of this research is to find what foods gnomes are believed to eat, that are also palatable to humans.

##### Method

Data about gnome food was collected by using Google Search with the keywords 'what do gnomes eat' (not as a phrase). Data was taken from the first 10 meaningful results on the Google search in order to identify the main patterns in opinion. Some of the results linked to forum posts with more than one opinion. There are 12 separate opinions in total.

The data was analysed using the main criterion of frequency of mention of the type of food. The second criterion used was the palatability of the foods.

##### Findings

As seen in Table 1, both plant-based and omnivorous foods were mentioned four times. Common to both categories was that only traditional foods were mentioned, not modern packaged foods. Both these groups are also palatable. Overall, 8 of the 12 opinions mentioned foods that were traditional.

Table 1: Frequency of food mentions and food palatability

Food category	Number of sources stating food	Palatability of food
Plant-based, e.g. nuts, fruits, vegetables.	4	High
Omnivorous and varied, includes meat and cheese.	4	High
Includes worms and arthropods (insects, spiders, etc.). 2 also mentioned packaged foods.	3	Low
Flesh-based foods only	1	Medium

##### Discussion

Although no one category of food was most believed to be foods that gnomes eat, both popular opinions had a common aspect: that the foods are traditional rather than modern and highly processed. This could reflect that gnomes are traditional mythical creatures and their presumed food choices may therefore be traditional rather than modern.

### Explanations

The TITLE is descriptive and shows what the report is about.

In the INTRODUCTION, the writer provides the background, significance, and research aim. They have also linked the research to relevant literature.

In the METHOD section, the writer describes how they did the research.

In the FINDINGS section, the writer describes what they found in their research. They present their analysis but at this stage, are not commenting on it, nor discussing the analysis in the context of other literature about it.

The paragraph describes the key findings shown in the table, but not all the data in the table. The writer has referred to the table in the text.

The writer includes a TABLE for complex data to help make it easier to understand quickly. Imagine trying to write all this information using sentences in one or more paragraphs!

The table is LABELLED (with table number and title) so it can be easily referred to in the text.

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Traditional foods give a wide range to choose from, which means that group members are likely to find foods they can enjoy with each other. This may lead to increased social bonding of group members (Dunbar 2017). Traditional food would support club values, positively impacting on organisational culture (Plester 2015).

### Conclusion

Gnomes are most commonly believed to eat traditional foods. The social eating of traditional foods by club members would support both bonding and club values. Therefore, a wide range of traditional foods, but no modern, packaged foods, would be suitable for the meetings of the Gnome Appreciation Society. A limitation of this research is that club members were not consulted about their food preferences, and they may not find traditional foods palatable. A survey of club members about preferred foods should be made before final decisions are made.

### References

Dunbar, R I M 2017, 'Breaking bread: the functions of social eating', *Adaptive Human Behavior and Physiology*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 198-211, viewed 13 July 2019, SpringerNature CAUL database, DOI 10.1007/s40750-017-0061-4.

Plester, B 2015, 'Ingesting the organization: The embodiment of organizational food rituals', *Culture and Organization*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 251-268, viewed 13 July 2019, CAUL Taylor & Francis Package 2019 database, DOI 10.1080/14759551.2013.873798.

In the **DISCUSSION**, the writer summarises what they found, makes their own comments on it, and discusses it by linking it back to relevant literature.

The writer's **CONCLUSION** contains a summary of key points, and shows how the key points **ANSWER THE RESEARCH QUESTION**. They have also mentioned the **LIMITATIONS** of the research, in this case, aspects of the research question that it cannot answer reliably. The writer has made a **RECOMMENDATION** for future action to overcome the limitation.

The writer has provided a **REFERENCE LIST** to guide the reader to the sources used. An academic research report would contain more than two references. An academic report also contains **CREDIBLE SOURCES**. In the example, the sources are peer-reviewed journal articles, and the referencing style is Harvard WesternSydU.

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