



Report tone

As with an essay, a report is a formal piece of academic (or professional) writing. It should be formal, impersonal, technical, and abstract. However, because a report often has practical outcomes in terms of decisions the reader might make, certain sections may use more concrete language (see below). Also, if the report is about your experience during a practical unit or similar, it will be more personal, but it should still remain formal, technical, and reasonably abstract (see below).



Formal

Being formal doesn't necessarily mean being complicated or hard to read, but you do need to take care with your word choice and expression. Because a report is often written with a professional audience in mind (even in an academic setting), you need to make it sound professional. Imagine you are writing for a business manager or other professional who wears a suit and tie every day!

To make your language sound as formal as possible, you should avoid using language features that are characteristic of spoken casual conversation, such as:

- colloquial or slang words (e.g. use 'children' instead of 'kids')
- contractions (e.g. use 'is not' instead of 'isn't')
- abbreviations (e.g. use the word 'maximum' instead of 'max')
- spoken-like grammatical structures such as run-on sentences or sentence fragments (find out more in [General writing help](#)).

Impersonal

Your report is all about the information, not about you. Your reader just wants to know what the situation is, how they should think about it, and what they should do about it. Even your analysis of the situation/problem and your recommendations need to be presented in impersonal terms.

Technical

You're writing your report about a specific topic in a specific academic discipline, and/or for a professional audience familiar with the concepts of the industry. So you should use technical terms associated with that topic and that discipline. This shows that you're developing an understanding of the special categories and terminology used in your discipline and industry. It also helps you to communicate more precisely about the particular discipline-specific concepts that are important in your treatment of the issues (see example of Introduction in [Report structure](#) (PDF, 109kB)).

Tips for learning to use the technical terms of your discipline:

- When you read your course readings, highlight terms that are not familiar to you. Do they seem to be specific to the discipline? Or are they just new words for you? You can check this by reading other sources in the same discipline, using the Library Search Box, or asking your tutor or fellow students.
- Note down key terms from your lectures and tutorials.
- Keep a glossary of the new terms you are learning.
- Take note of how scholars in your discipline use the terms, e.g. do they define the term for the reader or do they assume the reader knows what it means? Do they format it in a special way, e.g. using a capital letter(s) or an acronym? Do they contrast the term with other terms that have a similar meaning to clarify its scope?

Abstract

Your report may be about real-world problems, but most of it should be expressed in conceptual terms. The recommendations section is where it might get a bit more concrete, as you apply your analysis to suggest future actions.

The nouns you use should mostly be abstract nouns: qualities and concepts, things that you can't see or touch, e.g. sustainability, economic growth, pollution, anxiety, design. Many of these are related to verbs (e.g. growth comes from the verb 'grow', 'pollution' comes from the verb 'pollute'). You can find out more about abstract language in [General writing help](#).

More information

- Chapter 15 'Writing Reports: Problem-solution texts' in Brick, J. (2011). *Academic culture: A student's guide to studying at university* (2nd ed.) South Yarra, VIC: Macmillan.
- Deakin University's page on [Report writing](#).
- University of Wollongong's UniLearning page on [Report Writing](#).
- The [Clarity English](#) module 'Core Skills for Business Writing' has online tutorials on 'Reports: organising information' and 'Key sections of a report' that you can work through at your own pace, with practice examples and quizzes. You can find Clarity English under 'C' in the Library's [eResources](#), and [log in](#) (PDF) using your Western ID.