

Session Objectives:

- The elements of a report
- The text of the report

The Elements of a Report

A report consists of different components termed as 'elements' of the report. Every report need not contain all the elements. Also, the order in which these elements are organized in a report may differ.

Every organization has its own format of reports. The style guide of the organization provides a good basis for preparation of a report. Also, previous reports that have been successful can form a basis for developing subsequent reports. The reader's needs should be the prime consideration while developing a report.

The various elements of a report are:

Letter of Transmittal

The letter of transmittal is used to convey the purpose and content of the report. It is either attached to the report or placed on top of it. The letter of transmittal serves the following purposes:

- It allows the writer to highlight points he perceives to be of importance or of interest to the reader.
- It allows the writer to point out errors or omissions in the report.
- It allows the writer to attach information that may have been obtained after the preparation of the report.

A letter of transmittal contains:

- a) Statement of title, and if necessary, the purpose of report.
- b) Statement of who authorized and commissioned the report, and when.
- c) The methods used, the principal results, conclusion and recommendations of the project.
- d) An acknowledgment of any assistance received in preparing the report.
- e) An offer to assist in interpreting the report and undertaking further projects.

Title page and Title fly

The Title page conveys the subject and type of report. It also conveys information about the date of submission of the report, name and position of writer and also the name of principal reader.

Example: A report titled 'Analysis of civic amenities in Karimnagar' clearly conveys that it is an analysis report on civic amenities in Karimnagar.

A Title fly precedes the title page and comprises of a plain sheet of paper containing only the title of the report. It gives a formal touch to a report.

Abstract

An abstract is a brief technical summary of the report. Abstracts are directed towards readers who have knowledge about the subject. Hence the usage of technical terms in abstracts is common. An abstract helps the reader decide whether it is essential to read the entire report. Several copies of the abstract are made and are made available to the various departments of the organization. Abstracts are attached to the report

as well. There are two types of abstracts namely, descriptive and informative abstracts.

- **Descriptive Abstracts**

The descriptive abstract is also known as topical abstract or table of contents abstract. These give equal weightage to each topic covered in the report.

- **Informative Abstracts**

Informative abstracts are becoming increasingly popular because these are more detailed than descriptive abstracts. These abstracts define the problem, scope and methods, conclusion and recommendations of the report. This abstract includes the following elements:

- Name of the report, the writer and the department to which the writer belongs
- Problem statement
- Methods/Conclusion and recommendation

Table of Contents

The table of contents helps the reader locate the exact page containing the information he wants. It is the only guide to the report's structure, coverage and pagination. The topics and subtopics listed in the table of contents should be identical to the topics and subtopics as they appear in the report.

To make the table of contents easy to understand different styles like capitalization, underlining, indentation and italics may be used. A well designed table of contents makes it easy to read and remember the structure of the report.

List of Illustrations

List of illustrations is a table of contents for the tables and figures that appear in the report. If the report contains only figures, a list of figures is prepared and if it contains only tables, a list of tables is prepared. If the report contains both tables and figures, both list of figures as well as list of tables is prepared with the list of figures preceding the list of tables in the report. Both these lists together are known as the list of illustrations.

Executive Summary

Executive summary is sometimes referred to as executive overview, management summary or management overview. Executive summary is a brief overview of the report and should not exceed a double spaced single page. Executives seldom require details of the methodology adopted in the report. They are more interested in the benefit to the organization by implementing the recommendations given in the report. Therefore, the executive summary doesn't give much importance to the methodology adopted.

Further, the use of technical terms and advanced concepts should be avoided in the executive summary. The executive summary is given as much importance as the other headings in the table of contents.

Example: If a study is carried out on the use of alternative material to manufacture a product, managers are not interested in knowing the chemical properties of the new material but in knowing how replacing the currently used material with the new material would benefit the company.

The executive summary should include the following information:

Why is the new material better than the currently used material?

What are the costs involved?

How cost-effective is it to use the new material?

What are the limitations involved in switching over to use of the new material?

Glossary & List of Symbols

A glossary is an alphabetical list of definitions. It provides an explanation of the technical terms used in the report for the benefit of readers who are not familiar with these terms. The glossary may be placed at the end of the report just before the appendixes, or it may be placed immediately after the table of contents.

List of symbols is similar to the glossary but instead of defining terms, it defines symbols and what they represent in the report. Similar to the glossary, it may be placed before the appendixes or immediately after the table of contents.

The Appendix

The appendix contains material that is too bulky to be included in the body of the report or that is of interest to only a few readers. The appendix is placed after the body of the report and the back matter (bibliography, glossary, list of symbols). The appendix usually contains graphs, maps and charts, diagrams, computer printouts, test data and texts of supporting documents.

Appendixes are lettered (Appendix A, Appendix B, Appendix C, etc.) rather than numbered.

The Text of the report

The text of a report has a structure similar to that of an oral presentation. The text of a report begins with an introduction followed by the body of the report, the summary, conclusions and recommendations and ends with the notes and bibliography.

Introduction: The purpose of the introduction is to

- Relate the report to a problem or assignment
- State the purpose of the report
- Preview the contents and organization of the report
- Establish the tone of the report

The length of the varies with the length of the report and may range from one or two paragraphs to several pages.

The topics covered in the introduction of a report are

Authorization: This section informs when, how and by whom the report was authorized, who wrote the report, and when it was submitted.

Problem/Purpose: This part of the introduction deals with what is to be achieved by writing the report.

Scope: The scope conveys the complexity of the report and indicates the topics that will be covered and the topics that will not be covered in the report.

Background: This part of the introduction explains the factors that have led to the report. By reading the background, readers get to understand how problems had developed and how they had been tackled.

Limitations: These describe the factors affecting the quality of the report and include the constraints faced during preparation of the report. However, limitations should not become justifications for submission of poor-quality reports.

Report Organization: This part of the introduction describes why the report has been organized in a particular manner.

It is not mandatory that all these elements should be included in the introduction. If the abstract is detailed, the introduction may be brief.

The Body of The Report

The body of the report is the major section of the report and contains information that supports the conclusions and recommendations of the report. The amount of detail to be provided in the body depends upon the nature of information, purpose of the report and preferences of the target audience. It is recommended that only relevant details that support the conclusions and recommendations of the report be included in the body and all additional details be presented in tables, charts and appendixes.

The body of the report may include the conclusions if the conclusions logically flow from the evidence presented in the body of the report. However, if the conclusions need to be emphasized, they should be summarized as a separate section of the report.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The summary, conclusions and recommendations together form a paragraph or two in a short report whereas, in a long report, these form separate sections.

Summary: The summary comprises of a listing of the key findings in the order in which they appear in the body of the report.

Conclusions: The conclusion gives the writer's interpretation of the findings. In the conclusion, answers are provided to the questions that led to the report.

Recommendations: Recommendations are corrective actions or alternative suggestions given by the writer to tackle the problem.

A deductive or an inductive approach may be adopted to present the summary, conclusions and recommendations. However, most business reports are a combination of both the approaches.

Notes and Bibliography

An acknowledgment of the sources referred to while writing the report and accompanying details are provided in the notes given at the end of the report. The sources are mentioned in the text by numbers and they appear in the same order in the notes.

Bibliography is an alphabetical list of all the sources that have been consulted in the preparation of the report.

Summary

The elements of a report and their order vary with the purpose of the report and the needs of the reader. Organization of the elements of the report enhance its clarity and readability and thus make it more effective.

The structure of a report and the organization of the text depends on the purpose of the report, the needs of the readers, and the preferences of the organization with which the writer works.