

6.1a

Business Builder
Teacher Resource Series

An introduction to report writing

Worksheet

A Read the example report below. When you finish, read the report a second time and decide whether the author thinks statements 1–5 are True or False.

- 1 When revising your report you should keep the same headings and sections. T/F
- 2 It is better to try to write grammatically correct sentences right from the start. T/F
- 3 Reports are usually full of long phrases and complex grammatical structures. T/F
- 4 Your writing style will depend partly on who will read the report. T/F
- 5 The passive emphasizes the action rather than who does the action. T/F

Writing Business Reports

1 Introduction

This short report summarizes the topic of writing business reports. It discusses the importance of organizing the report into logical sections. It recommends some techniques for writing clearly and also considers some important grammatical areas. The report emphasizes that planning and then rewriting several times is the key to successful report writing.

2 Structure of a report

The report you are now reading is typical of a short report: first an introduction that describes the purpose and structure of the report, then the body of the report, and finally some recommendations or conclusions. Longer reports may have other sections such as a summary, table of contents or perhaps appendices with extra, non-essential information. Many in-company reports have a standard format and so the writer does not have to worry about the structure.

3 Sections and paragraphs

Reports are often about complex issues, so the writer has to organize the material very clearly into logical sections and sub-sections with appropriate headings. Deciding how to do this is probably the most important step in report writing. Of course as you write you may move information around and change your headings.

Within each section the material is divided into paragraphs. Short paragraphs help the reader to see the structure of the argument and understand the information. A simple rule is: one main idea, one paragraph.

4 The techniques of report writing

- Focus initially on the ideas, not the language and grammar. Leave the language until the editing and rewriting stage. (Each version you write is called a draft).
- Use short phrases. Keep sentences brief and use simple grammatical structures.
- Use an impersonal style. Focus on facts and only name individuals when it is relevant.
- Present your points in a balanced way that shows you have considered the arguments carefully.
- Keep the reader in mind. For example, a report written for a senior manager might be respectful and polite, with suggestions for the manager to consider. A report for junior staff is more likely to use a direct style and have short sentences and statements rather than suggestions.

Continued ...

6.1b

An introduction to report writing

Worksheet

5 The language of report writing

5.1 Linking words

Sentences and paragraphs need linking words to help the reader understand the structure of the argument. For example:

<i>First, ... Second, ... Finally, ...</i>	a sequence
<i>Moreover, ... / In addition to this, ...</i>	adding another, related idea
<i>However, ... / On the other hand, ...</i>	a contrast
<i>... due to ... / Therefore, ...</i>	cause and result

Linking words can also be used to show a personal attitude. For example, if you begin a sentence with the word *Clearly*, what comes next will be obvious. If you begin with the word *Apparently*, you are indicating that you are uncertain of your facts.

5.2 Formal language

Most business writing is neutral and direct rather than formal. Three areas of grammar are useful when a more formal, impersonal style is needed. They are:

- The passive *A decision is expected by the end of the year.*
20,000 new jobs were created in the financial sector last year.
The final payment will be made in September.
- 'It' + passive *It is recommended that we reduce the training budget by 10%.*
It should be emphasized that this data is only provisional.
It was suggested/agreed that we use a different supplier.
- Compound nouns *a planning meeting; a production planning meeting*
the sales conference; the summer sales conference
insurance documents; transport insurance documents

Formal language like this is only used when it makes the report easier to understand. For example, in the second example above we do not know who created the jobs, so the passive is better. Similarly, in the sixth example it is not important who made the suggestion, so the passive is better. Compound nouns avoid the use of long phrases full of prepositions: 'a meeting about the planning of our production'.

5.3 Informal language

Contractions like *It's, we'll, there's* and words and phrases typical of informal speech like *big, OK, nice, no way, fantastic* should not appear in reports.

6 Conclusion

Reports can be about many things: an analysis of a problem, a summary of a completed job, the progress of a project, the results of an investigation. There are few general rules, but remember that organizing the material into logical sections is the key. Finally, remember also that the reader will be very busy, so be as brief and clear as possible.

B Choose one of the topics below and write a mini-report.

- Summary/evaluation of a newspaper/magazine article.
- Summary/evaluation of this course up to now.
- Summary/evaluation of a recent meeting/negotiation (in real life or on this course).
- Report writing in my job (types of report, objectives, audience, preparation, content etc.).
- Opportunities for tourism in my country.