

Planning a Report – helpful information and advice

Many business people have to write lengthy and detailed reports for colleagues and clients. The advice below may help you to write more effective reports.

Planning the report

Before you begin writing, plan how you are going to present the information in your report. Decide how many sections of the report you need.

Headings

Decide what headings you will give each section. Headings should be short, clear summaries of each section. They are important because they indicate the content of that section to the reader. Also, they help to make the information more accessible as they can act as reference points, for example, during a meeting.

Layout

The better the layout, the more attractive the report. The more attractive the report, the easier it is to read. You can improve the layout by:

- using a clear, simple numbering system for the sections,
- laying out the sections under clear headings, and
- bulleting and/or indenting key pieces of information.

Paragraphs and Sentences

A paragraph should deal with one topic. The first sentence should set the topic and the rest of the paragraph should develop it. Each paragraph should reach a logical conclusion and, where appropriate and possible, should prepare the reader for the next topic. The overall clarity of the paragraph depends on the clear progression of the ideas it contains and, of course, the clarity of the individual sentences.

Sentences can be difficult to understand if they are too long and complicated. Remember your reader. If s/he is not an expert in the subject, try to avoid using technical or jargon words wherever possible. Use simple language. Keep your sentences short.

(Notice how the second paragraph in this section follows on logically from the first. The conclusion of the first also leads naturally into the second paragraph.)

Improving your report writing

Read good reports written by native speakers of English. Study the way the writer organises the information. Look at the different layouts used. Notice how the writer leads the reader through the report. And remember: ***Practice Makes Perfect!***

USEFUL PHRASES [REPORT]

INTRODUCTION

- The aim / intention / purpose of this report is to outline / present / discuss / sum up ...
- Further to my visit to ..., I have prepared the following report.
- I have recently visited ... and have prepared the following report for your consideration.
- This involved visiting / looking at / investigating ... / The data was obtained by ...
- In order to help make this report I asked / discussed / gave out a questionnaire ...
- It is based on my observations / the feedback from participants ...
- My findings are outlined / presented below. / I outline my findings below.
- The report contains the relevant details concerning the problem as you required.

INTRODUCING POINTS

- To begin with ... / Let us start with ... First(ly) ... / In the first place ... / First of all ... / The first aspect / thing to consider is ... Second(ly) ... / Third(ly) ... Moreover ... / Furthermore ... / What is more ... Another aspect to consider ... / Yet another aspect / consideration is ...
- Besides that ... / Apart from that ... / In addition to this ... / On top of that ...

INTRODUCING YOUR OPINION

- I think / believe that ... / In my opinion ... / I am of the opinion that ... / It seems to me that
- Personally I believe that ... / In my view ... / If you ask me ... / To my mind ... / As far as I am concerned ... I would like to suggest / recommend ... / I therefore suggest / recommend ...
- I (strongly) recommend ... / My recommendation is to ...

INTRODUCING SOMEONE ELSE'S OPINION

- A few / Many / The majority / minority of people said / reported / complained ...
- According to ... / As ... said ... / In the words of ... It is said that ... / It is often suggested that ...

GIVING EXAMPLES

- For example / instance ... This can be shown / illustrated / demonstrated / clarified by ...
- Let me just give you an example, ... The picture / diagram shows / illustrates ...

COMPARING

- One of the main / biggest / most significant / ... differences between ... and ... is ...
- Unlike ..., ... is ... / While / Whereas / Although ... is, ... is completely / entirely / totally different from is a little / slightly / somewhat / a great deal bigger / more elegant / ... than ...
- ... is not quite / nearly as comfortable / expensive / convenient / ... as ...
- ... is virtually / exactly the same as ... when it comes to ...

CONCLUSION

- It can be seen from the data / reactions / information above that ...
- All things considered, I believe that ... / Taking everyone's comments into consideration ... • In general / On the whole I found that ...
- In conclusion ... / To conclude ... / To sum up ... / In summary ...
- To put the matter in a nutshell ... / In a nutshell ...