
UNIT 2 WRITING REPORT: LONG AND SHORT REPORTS

Structure

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- 2.3 Punctuation
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will know

- the differences between long reports and short reports
- how to write a short report
- about the different elements of a short report
- how to write a long report
- about the different parts of a long report

2.1 WARM UP

- What do you understand by the term report?
- What did you find in your report cards in school?
- Is there any difference between your school report card and the report you read in the newspaper

A business report is any factual, objective document that serves a business purpose”

- Usually a short report is prepared and read on the College/ School Annual Day. What is it about?
- Have you read a report published by any company? Did you find it interesting?

2.2 READING: WHAT ARE BUSINESS REPORTS?

Written business reports are an integral part of the functioning of any business concern. They assist companies in problem fixing/solving and arriving at decisions. They also function as factual, objective documents regarding the company or business house. Thus, a business report is a solicited document written for a specific purpose according to the prescribed terms of reference and designed for a specific audience. The responsibility of communicating facts, findings, analysis and recommendations rests on the writer of the report.

Reports and proposals are commonly used in organizations for both informational and analytical purposes. Decision-making, problem solving, performance monitoring, market surveys, etc. are some of the areas where reports make the process thorough and well structured.

On the basis of length, there are short reports which are generally of one to nine pages and are different from long reports which are of ten or more pages. The former may analyze just one aspect of the problem and not require any formal research whereas the latter examines a problem in detail and requires more extensive research and preparation time.

A few important points may be kept in mind while preparing a report:

- i) A report is usually a documentation after an event or activity, thus the use of past tense
- ii) A report is often solicited, that is, someone has asked for the report to be prepared.
- iii) It is usually upward communication within an organization, thus the tone used is formal
- iv) A report should have a conclusion, in the form of suggestions, recommendations or simply advice, as per the purpose of the report

Whenever a report is required to be written, an individual or a team is assigned to the task. The scope, purpose, subject and time-limit of the report are prescribed by the one who needs the report to be prepared. One could follow a useful pattern like this –

To report on ... (subject)...as requested by ... (name and designation) on... (date)...

(Taylor 2005: 131)

2.2.1 Short Reports

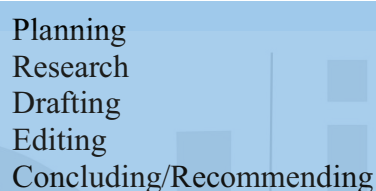
Short reports are both a bane and a blessing. Busy executives dislike the number of short reports they have to go through, yet the only redeeming fact

is that they are short. A short report is concise, accurate, unbiased, all inferences depending on supporting evidence to help readers make an informed decision.

Short reports are usually less than five pages and do not need the elaborate outlines and structuring of the long report. The three basic sub-sections are introduction, investigation/body and conclusion / summary. Simple headings and sub-headings help the reader to follow the text of the short report. Avoid using a running text. Instead, break up the text in terms of its thematic units. This would also help the report from becoming visually tedious.

A good short report will require both clarity and objectivity so that the reader of the report can see things the way you have mapped the main issues.

A five-step formula may be adopted while preparing the report.



Planning
Research
Drafting
Editing
Concluding/Recommending

A short report generally has three sections to it.

Introduction

Body (discussion, text)

Terminal section (summary, conclusions, recommendations)

Introduction: It includes the purpose of the report, the individual or organisation which has authorized it, the scope, background and limits of the report.

Body: It presents all the relevant facts accurately and impartially. There is no scope for personal bias and prejudice.

Organization of the report should be done logically with emphasis on important ideas. Important details need to be highlighted either through appropriate headings, capitalization, italics, or repetition.

Inclusion of visuals like charts, maps, pie diagrams graphs etc to focus and clarify important information.

Use of headings and sub-headings to help the reader go through the report with ease.

Terminal section: It has a summary of the entire text together with conclusions which have been drawn from the main text. There are recommendations sections which define the course of action.

No new information or material should be included in this section.

A **summary** should be written in the same order as the topics discussed in the main text.

Short reports could have two kinds of formats: **Memo Style** and **Letter Style**. The pattern that they follow is derived from the letter or memo itself, but their purpose remains different. Given below is an example of both kinds.

The Memo Style Report: Block Format

TO: Mr. Satish Arora
 FROM: A. Ravi
 DATE: February 6, 2017

SUBJECT: Report on Staff Overtime for January, 2017

As per your instruction, I have computed the number of overtime hours put in by the staff members of the different sections and the overtime allowance due to each one of them.

	Staff	Hourly Wage	No. of Occasions	Total Hours	Total Payments
1.	Roshan	Rs. 50	6	8	Rs. 2400
2.	Anant	Rs. 60	8	10	Rs. 4800
3.	Atif	Rs. 80	4	6	Rs. 1920
4.	James	Rs. 80	5	4	Rs. 1600
TOTALS			23	28	Rs. 10720

The total expenditure incurred on overtime is likely to go up further by about 50% in the next three months as we move towards the end of the financial year and the target deadlines have to be completed.

The Letter Style Report: Format

MAJORSOFT INDIA
 22, KASTURBA
 GANDHI MARG
 NEW DELHI-110001

4 January, 20XX

Dear Mr. Sena,

Sub: Feasibility of setting up a cold storage unit in Jhansi:

We have conducted a feasibility study for setting up a cold storage unit in Jhansi. We feel that it is a good proposal since there are no cold storage units in that area. Farmers from the neighboring villages have to travel at least 200 kms to sell their vegetables at the mandi in Lucknow. Consequently 30% of their vegetables perish.

The cold storage unit will help farmers to store their vegetables here and their vegetables will not get spoilt. Consequently, their profits will increase. We are in the process of locating land to build the cold storage unit. Do let us know if any further matter needs to be enquired into.

Yours sincerely
Rama Malik
Assistant Sales Manager

In case the report is a little longer, say 9-10 pages, it is advisable to use a letter of transmittal or prefatory note. These are basically forms of covering letters or covering notes and the report can come after that.

2.2.2 Long Reports

Formal long reports have the following elements:

1. **Cover Page:** As the name suggests this is the first page or cover page of the report and it has the title of the report, the report number and the date.
2. **Title Page:** The title page consists of the following information:
 - Title of the report (short and unambiguous)
 - The name/names of persons who prepared the report
 - The name/names of persons or organization who authorized the report
 - Date of submission
3. **Letter of transmittal:** This is the introduction to the report very similar to the preface to a book. It can be written in the first person using personal pronouns and the style can be relatively informal compared to the rest of the report. It discusses the various issues that the report contains including the scope of the report, the methods used for the findings and drawbacks and limitations, if any. It also highlights the major findings of the report, the conclusion and the recommendations. It acknowledges and thanks persons who have helped in the completion of the report and also thanks the organization or persons who have asked for the report.
4. **Table of contents:** It is a kind of map or a reference page of the report. It is an outline of the report, indicating the coverage, sequence and hierarchical importance of the information in the report. The different topics in the report are identified together with their page numbers for easy access and reference. One should list the contents with their relevant headings in the same order as they appear in the report to avoid confusion. The visuals in the report can be listed separately for convenience but if there are very few visuals, they can be put in the content list. The table of contents is an important document because it helps people to locate specific information in an otherwise long report.

- 5. Executive Summary:** This finds place just after the table of contents. It is a summary of the report and includes all the relevant and significant information that the actual report contains including the introduction, the findings, the recommendations, the conclusions and relevant illustrations of charts, graphs and pie diagrams if any.

Busy executives prefer reading the executive summary rather than the long report to get a preview of the report.

‘A good executive summary opens a window into the body of the report and allows the reader to quickly see how well you have managed your message’ (Bovee et al., 2003 p 467).

The actual report has three parts to it:

Introduction

Body

Conclusion

- 6. Introduction:** This tells us the main purpose of the report together with the scope of the report, its contents and limitations if any. It also talks about the methodology used to collect data (both from primary and secondary sources), like sampling and questionnaires and the different statistical tools used for analysis.
- 7. Body:** This gives a detailed discussion of the results of the findings using the different research tools. A lot of information in the form of graphs, charts and tables help in understanding the details of the report. It is recommended to substantiate the findings with visual inputs for better comprehension. The body of the report is divided into a number of sections which is further subdivided into sub-sections. All of them will require headings and therefore use the numbering system of decimals to distinguish the different sections and subsections.

Given below is an e.g.

Section Headings	1	2	3
Sub-section	1.1	2.1	3.1
	1.2	2.2	3.2
Sub Sub-section	1.1.1	2.1.1	3.1.1
	1.1.2	2.1.2	3.1.2
Sub section of	1.1.1(a)	2.1.1(a)	3.1.1(a)
The sub sub-section	1.1.1(b)	2.1.1(b)	3.1.1(b)

This will help the reader to go through the report in a logical manner and avoid confusion with the various headings and sub-headings.

8. **Conclusion:** This is a summary of the main points of the report together with relevant recommendations. Use the SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities, threats) analysis for recommendations.
 - It also gives a detailed result of the investigation.
 - It also answers all the questions raised in the report initially.
 - puts forward problems if any in achieving the objectives
 - gives clear and definite recommendations
 - states briefly the action to be taken
 - states how it can help in any future course of action
9. **Appendix:** This contains all the reference material and documents which have been used directly or indirectly in the writing of the report. Moreover, some of the documents and research material may be too long and therefore it would not be possible to include them as part of the report, hence they are included in the appendix. Information included in the appendix are sample questionnaires, statistical data, statistical formulas, copies of important documents used, other instruments of survey etc. Each of the appendices needs to be numbered and captioned. The documents need to be arranged in a logical sequence. Avoid including irrelevant appendices.
10. **Glossary:** The glossary contains all the technical terms which have been used in the report. The terms are arranged alphabetically as in a dictionary to facilitate the reader to locate any particular term/ word. It also explains how the words are used and gives a brief about the rules followed while abbreviating technical words.
11. **Bibliography:** It is a list of secondary sources used while preparing the report. All textual sources whether published or unpublished should be acknowledged. It is generally written in the following manner:
 - the name(s) of the author
 - title
 - name of publisher, place of publication
 - year of publication and edition if any
12. **Index:** It is a detailed listing of names, places, subjects, together with the page number where they are mentioned. It is organized in an alphabetical manner. A reader is able to locate information regarding any topic with the help of the index.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Why are reports written?

.....
.....
.....

2. Mention the major points of difference between a short report and a long report.
3. What are some of the similarities between a short report and a long report?
4. What is an executive summary in a long report?

Check Your Progress 2

Imagine that the Director of your company has asked you to look into the health and safety provisions in the company's offices and to make recommendations for improvement.

You have prepared a set of notes by talking to various people and the union representatives. Draft a report to your Director on the basis of these notes

Sometimes we make errors which can destroy the efficacy of our report.

What are the commonly made errors?

Seven Errors that can undermine Your Reports

1. **Lack of objectivity**
Seeing only the facts that support your view and ignoring any contradictory information
2. **Hasty generalizations**
Forming judgments on the basis of insufficient evidence or special cases
3. **Hidden assumptions**
Hiding a questionable major premise
4. **Either-or scenarios**
Setting up two alternatives and not allowing for others
5. **False causal relationships**
Assuming that event A caused event B only because A preceded B
6. **Begged questions**
Assuming as proven what you are going to prove.
7. **Personal attacks or appeals to popular prejudice**
Sinking people or ideas you don't like by chaining them to irrelevant but unpopular actions or ideas.

(Adapted from Bovee, Thill, Schatzman, *Business Communication Today*, p 413)

2.3 PUNCTUATION

A neat and presentable report must be thoroughly proofread with no spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors. Below we give you practice in aspects of punctuation.

Check Your Progress 3

Look at the report written by the General Manager of a company regarding improved production by the company. Read the text carefully and add suitable punctuation wherever necessary.

As a result of the productivity survey carried out in the factory more rapid and efficient ways of operating are now being applied in the factory productivity has been increased by over 50 per cent the management intends to apply these same methods to office staff in order to reduce costs our company must adapt in a competitive world we aim to find ways of avoiding unnecessary actions by all staff we therefore propose to pay a months extra salary to any person who in the managements opinion has put forward the most practical suggestion to improve a particular office routine all suggestions should be sent to the mds office before the end of next month

2.4 GRAMMAR

We will be revising Reported speech and Question formation

Look at the examples given below to understand what you say when you report what someone has said:

Notice the verbs that are used to introduce each report.

The verb in the reported part is always in the past tense as are the time expressions

One normally reports in the third person, unless one is talking about what you said yourself.

In statements:

‘I will be going to Mumbai tomorrow.’

She said that she will be going to Mumbai the next day.

In requests:

‘Can we send you the documents today?’

She asked whether she could send us the documents the same day.’

In questions:

‘Are you going for the meeting next week?’

She wanted to know if I was going for the meeting the week after.

Check Your Progress 4

Transform the conversation below into reported speech:

Mr. Khan: Good morning! I'm just calling to ask about the shipment of office furniture. Has it arrived yet?

Ms. Arora: Well I'm not really sure.

Mr. Khan: Do you think it has got delayed somewhere?

Ms. Arora: I really don't know. I have not received any delivery note.

Mr. Khan: Well the problem is we have not received any payment.

Ms. Arora: Is that the reason why you are calling today?

Mr. Khan: Well you have always been so regular with your payments earlier.

Ms. Arora: I know. Actually, we have a cash-flow problem at the moment.

Mr. Khan: So, what do you propose to do?

Ms. Arora: Could we make the payment after two weeks?

Mr. Khan: Very well, but not beyond that.

Check Your Progress 5

Given below are some answers. Frame appropriate questions to the answers given below:

Example: I wrote to Mr. Sinha. Who did you write to?

1. I phoned her yesterday afternoon.
.....
2. He went to Chennai.
.....
3. No, I didn't see the report
.....
4. I spoke to the chairman's secretary.
.....
5. The weather was great.
.....

2.5 SPEAKING AND WRITING

Imagine that you are the manager (Personnel) of your organization. A memo has been sent to you by your Managing Director regarding extended lunch breaks in the company. Read and discuss with the other managers of the organization the following questions:

- market surveys

2. Mention the major points of difference between a short report and a long report.

Short Report: about 5 to 9 pages; analyses only an aspect of a problem; does not require any formal research; has generally three sections—Introduction, Body, Terminal section (Recommendations, Summary); could be in the form of memos, letter etc.

Long Report: lengthy-more than 10 pages; requires extensive research; analyses a problem in depth; has a formal structure with several sections; is preceded by a letter of transmittal or prefatory note

3. What are some of the similarities between a short report and a long report?

- i) A report is usually a documentation after an event or activity, thus the use of past tense
- ii) A report is often solicited, that is, someone has asked for the report to be prepared.
- iii) It is usually upward communication within an organization, thus the tone used is formal
- iv) A report should have a conclusion, in the form of suggestions, recommendations or simply advice, as per the purpose of the report

4. What is an executive summary in a long report?

Executive Summary: This finds place just after the table of contents. It is a summary of the report and includes all the relevant and significant information that the actual report contains including the introduction, the findings, the recommendations, the conclusions and relevant illustrations of charts, graphs and pie diagrams if any.

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Check Your Progress 2

Health and safety problems in the company’s offices:

A number of cases of symptoms of job-related stress and depression as reported by counselor

Talked to people and studied all reports of colds, allergies, and job stress

Reports of many cases of Repetitive Strain Injury as informed by physiotherapist

Had meetings with union reps. and office managers about what to do

Recommendations / Proposals

1. clearly display safety regulations in canteen and main office
2. office staff need training on sitting in correct posture while working on computers
3. new staff need to be given information about safety regulations and policy, e.g. taking frequent breaks from the screen
4. departmental committee on health and safety to be responsible for giving instructions on handling office equipment and other electronic and mechanical machinery.
5. ventilation and air conditioners need regular cleaning and maintenance
6. union reps suggested replacement of sub- standard furniture and equipment
 - a. old fashioned screens- cause eye sight problems
 - b. Ineffective and inadequate office lighting causing headaches etc.
 - c. Important to have chairs with back support- many staff complains of backache.

Check Your Progress 3

Look at the report written by the General Manager of a company regarding improved production by the company. Read the text carefully and add suitable punctuation wherever necessary.

As a result of the productivity survey carried out in the factory, more rapid and efficient ways of operating are now being applied. In the factory productivity has been increased by over 50 per cent. The management intends to apply these same methods to office staff in order to reduce costs. Our company must adapt in a competitive world. We aim to find ways of avoiding unnecessary actions by all staff. We, therefore, propose to pay a month's extra salary to any person who in the management's opinion has put forward the most practical suggestion to improve a particular office routine. All suggestions should be sent to the mds office before the end of next month.

Check Your Progress 4

Mr. Khan called to ask whether the shipment of office furniture had arrived to which Ms. Arora replied that she was not sure. Mr. Khan further asked whether the goods had got delayed somewhere and complained that he had not received any payment. Ms. Arora said that they were having a cash flow problem and would be able to pay in in two weeks' time. Mr. Khan accepted the timeline with the stricture that this duration would not be extended.

Check Your Progress 5

1. When did you phone her?
2. Where did he go?
3. Did you see the report?
4. Whom did you speak to?
5. How was the weather?

Check Your Progress 6

Do it yourself

2.8 REFERENCES

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