

# Writing 2 Factual reports

## Write an executive summary

What do you think?

**1** What factors can make a report easy or difficult to read? Think about the last report that you read.

- Did it have a clear, logical structure?
- Was it easy to follow?

**2** Look at the items 1-6. Which part a-c of a report would you expect to find them in?

- 1 Main arguments, findings and evidence
- 2 Summary of the main conclusions
- 3 Recommendations for action
- 4 Appendices (section for supplementary information)
- 5 Graphs, tables, charts to illustrate key facts
- 6 Purpose of the report

- a The opening paragraphs
- b The body of the report
- c The end of the report

What do you write? 1

It is a good idea to use visual clues to guide the reader and to structure paragraphs. Look at the report extract below and match the parts with the following.

- 1 (Numbered) subheading
- 2 Bullet point
- 3 (Numbered) heading
- 4 Bold typeface
- 5 List

- a → **2.0 Training**  
Training budgets throughout the company were re-evaluated during the last quarter, allowing department heads to focus spending on the requirements of their staff. After consulting with departmental managers, it was agreed that seminars would be held on:
- b →
  - database analysis
  - spreadsheets
- c →
  - effective use of Powerpoint presentations.
- d → **2.1 Database analysis seminar**  
The department intends to offer one full-day training seminar in this area, although further courses may be scheduled if required. Two main training organisations were considered for the seminar: **Infos** and **Headlamp Inc.** After analysing course content, it was decided that ...
- e →

What do you write? 2

An **executive summary** is sometimes circulated independently of the main report. It gives the gist of the main information and means it isn't necessary to read the entire document. An executive summary usually contains:

- the purpose of the report
- any necessary recommendations
- conclusions.

**1** Match the functions 1-4 with the words and phrases a-l that you can use when writing an executive summary.

- 1 Introduce conclusions or recommendations
- 2 Give ideas that show a contrast
- 3 Add a point or idea
- 4 Focus attention on a specific topic or idea

- |                   |                       |                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| a Regarding ...   | e While ...           | i Concerning ...  |
| b Furthermore ... | f For this reason ... | j Whereas ...     |
| c However ...     | g Consequently ...    | k As a result ... |
| d Therefore ...   | h Nevertheless ...    | l In addition ... |

**2** Look at this extract from an executive summary and underline the correct word in *italics*.

### Executive summary

#### Introduction

The aim of the report is to explain why sales of the Demarco CX Printer failed to reach expected targets. The product launch initially produced encouraging results in the domestic market, *whereas / regarding* the overseas market was a little slower to respond ...

#### Conclusions

Market research carried out at the R&D stage suggested that this market was oversubscribed. *Furthermore / Nevertheless*, we believed that the unique selling points of the CX would lead to success in this market without the need for any increase in the marketing budget. *Therefore / While* other, lower-priced brands were able to retain their market share, the cost of the CX proved ...

#### Recommendations

There are two main recommendations for improving sales of the CX. *Concerning / In addition* to advertising, a new advertising campaign will be needed to highlight the unique selling points. *Regarding / Consequently*, the marketing budget will need to be increased by approximately 15% ...

Task

**Objective: Write an executive summary**

You have written a detailed report on one of the following topics. Write the executive summary (maximum one page) for the report.

- A project that you are / have recently been involved with
- A training course that you have attended
- Main challenges for your country / company in the next five years

# 6.1a

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## 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

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## 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.

# 6.2a

## Linking words and paragraph structure

Worksheet

- A** Linking words join one idea to another and help the reader to see how your argument is developing. Underline five linking words or phrases in this report extract about Kalia, an imaginary country.

Finally, the Kalian government is giving more control of economic policy to the regions. For instance, foreign companies do not need a license from the Industry Ministry. Moreover, these companies pay part of their taxes directly to the region where they are based rather than pay the whole amount to central government. On the whole this has made investing in Kalia much easier. However some problems, like the reform of agriculture, can only be dealt with at a national level.

Now complete the table with the words you underlined.

Showing a sequence	First Secondly After that
Talking generally	In general Typically
Making a contrast	On the other hand Nevertheless
Adding another point	In addition to this
Giving an example	For example e.g.

- B** Match each word or phrase from the left box with one from the right box.

In fact i.e. As a result  
In particular Obviously

Therefore Actually That is to say  
Of course Above all

Now complete the table by adding the ten words.

Giving real/true/surprising information	As a matter of fact
Saying something is obvious	Clearly
Giving the most important example	Especially
Rephrasing in a different way	In other words
Giving a result/consequence	For this reason

- C** Choose the correct words in this report extract. Look carefully at the whole context.

### How to Cut the Time You Spend On Reports

Does information technology mean the end of paper in our offices? (1) *In fact/Moreover*, the amount of paper used in business is slowly going down, but not in all areas. (2) *For this reason/In particular*, the number of reports actually seems to keep growing. (3) *Clearly/Nevertheless* some reports are essential and need to be studied carefully, but (4) *above all/in general* reports are only read very quickly, and some are never read at all.

What can you do to reduce the amount you read and write? (5) *First/As a matter of fact*, see if each report is really needed. (6) *That is to say/However*, ask yourself 'If this report was destroyed in a fire tomorrow, what would be the result?'. The answer might surprise you. (7) *For example/Second*, keep your reports short and easy to understand. Can you use a graph instead of text? Is the writing clear and simple? (8) *Typically/Above all*, think of your readers: are you telling them more than they need to know? One suggestion is only to circulate the summary and recommendations. Your readers may miss some of the details, but (9) *especially/on the other hand* if they want the full report they can ask for it. :

(10) *In conclusion/Nevertheless*, it is possible to save time on reports, but it may mean there is less information in circulation.

# 6.2b

## Linking words and paragraph structure

Worksheet

- D** Look at paragraphs 1–4 from a report about Kalia. The first sentence is missing each time.

### Investment opportunities in Kalia

- ..... The Government is liberalizing the economy and many nationalized industries are being privatized. Inflation is finally under control and industrial output is growing.
- ..... Roads and telecommunications are being modernized and a new port is being built at the mouth of the Delta river.
- ..... One of Kalia's success stories has been the growth of software exports, and leading multinational suppliers like Hewlett-Packard and Acer have strong Kalian partners.
- ..... The reform process has slowed down in recent months as politicians fear that their policies are becoming unpopular, particularly among workers in the large state-owned industries. There are also doubts about Kalia's ability to generate enough electricity for its industrial sector.

Choose the best opening sentence for each paragraph from those in the box below (two are not used).

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| a | However, there are still many problems ahead.                                     |
| b | Opportunities for investing in Kalia have never been better.                      |
| c | High interest rates are not the only cause of the economic recession.             |
| d | Rapid progress is being made in the area of infrastructure.                       |
| e | Reform of the financial sector will be crucial to Kalia's continuing development. |
| f | The government has recognized the importance of information technology.           |

- The sentences in the box are called topic sentences. What is a 'topic sentence'?
- In general, when do you start a new paragraph?

- E** Write a few paragraphs for a report on *The Future of My Market*:
- First write some topic sentences, each one introducing and summarizing a new idea.
  - Then expand each topic sentence into a full paragraph by adding another sentence or two.
  - Remember to use linking words to help the reader to see how your argument is developing.

Example: *The Future of the Financial Services Market*

### Topic sentences

- Companies in the financial services sector all offer similar products.
- In the future, the trend will be to produce solutions for individual customers rather than mass marketing.
- More and more, financial products will be sold over the phone and the Internet.
- The industry needs to make its products easier to understand for the ordinary person.

### Topic sentences expanded into paragraphs

- Companies in the financial services sector all offer similar products. There is very little difference between the pension plans and life insurance policies of the main companies. Some may have a better past performance than others, but this is no guide to the future. In fact the only real difference that the customer notices is the advertising.
- However, this situation cannot last for much longer. In the future, the trend will be to produce solutions for ...