Learning Enhancement Team

University of East Anglia

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICE

Writing Reports

This guide has been written to provide a general introduction to writing reports. It outlines the typical structure of a report and provides a step-by-step guide to producing reports that are clear and well structured.

What is a report?

A report is written for a clear purpose and to a particular audience. Specific information and evidence are presented, analysed and applied to a particular problem or issue. The information is presented in a clearly structured format making use of sections and headings so that the information is easy to locate and follow.

When you are asked to write a report, you will usually be given a report brief which provides you with instructions and guidelines. The report brief may outline the purpose, audience and problem or issue that your report must address, together with any specific requirements for format or structure. This guide offers a general introduction to report writing; be sure also to take account of specific instructions provided by your department.

What makes a good report?

Two of the reasons why reports are used as forms of written assessment are:

- to find out what you have learned from your reading, research or experience
- to give you experience of an important skill that is widely used in the workplace.

An effective report presents and analyses facts and evidence that are relevant to the specific problem or issue of the report brief. All sources used should be acknowledged and referenced throughout, in accordance with the preferred method of your department. The style of writing in a report is usually less discursive than in an essay, with a more direct and economic use of language. A well written report will demonstrate your ability to:
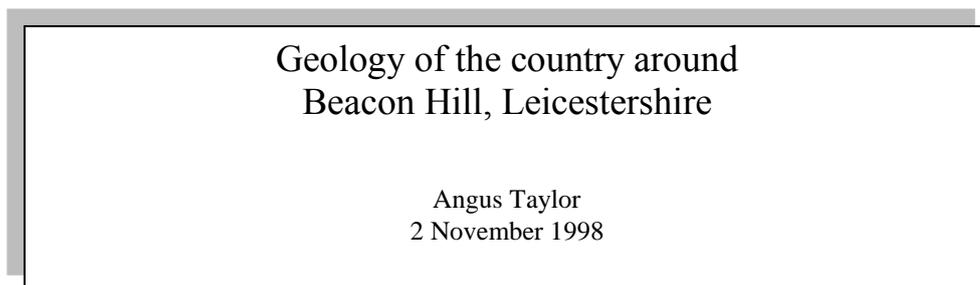
- understand the purpose of the report brief and adhere to its specifications
- gather, evaluate and analyse relevant information
- structure material in a logical and coherent order
- present your report in a consistent manner according to the instructions of the report brief
- make appropriate conclusions that are supported by the evidence and analysis of the report
- make thoughtful and practical recommendations where required.

The structure of a report

The main features of a report are described below to provide a general guide. These should be used in conjunction with the instructions or guidelines provided by your department.
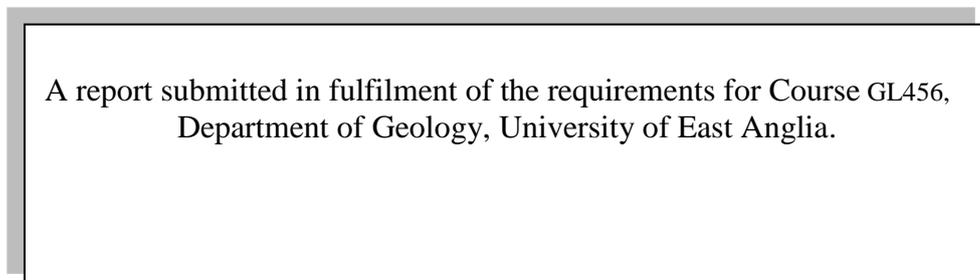
Title Page

This should briefly but explicitly describe the purpose of the report (if this is not obvious from the title of the work). Other details you may include could be your name, the date and for whom the report is written.

> # Geology of the country around
> # Beacon Hill, Leicestershire
>
> Angus Taylor
> 2 November 1998

Terms of reference

Under this heading you could include a brief explanation of who will read the report (audience), why it was written (purpose) and how it was written (methods). It may be in the form of a subtitle or a single paragraph.

> A report submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for Course GL456, Department of Geology, University of East Anglia.

Summary (Abstract)

The summary should briefly describe the content of the report. It should cover the aims of the report, what was found and what, if any, action is called for. Aim for about a half page in length and avoid detail or discussion; just outline the main points. Remember that the summary is the first thing that is read. It should provide the reader with a clear, helpful overview of the content of the report.

Exposure of rocks belonging to the Charnian Supergroup (late Precambrian) were examined in the area around Beacon Hill, north Leicestershire. This report aims to provide details of the stratigraphy at three sites – Copt Oak, Mount St Bernard Abbey and Oaks in Charnwood. It was observed that at each of these sites, the Charnian Supergroup consists mainly of volcaniclastic sediments (air-fall and ash-flow tuffs) interbedded with mudstones and siltstones. These Rocks show features that are characteristic of deposition in shallow water on the flanks of a volcano (e.g. welding and alteration of ignimbrites). Further studies are required to understand depositional mechanisms and to evaluate the present-day thickness of individual rock units.

Contents (Table of Contents)

The contents page should list the different chapters and/or headings together with the page numbers. Your contents page should be presented in such a way that the reader can quickly scan the list of headings and locate a particular part of the report. You may want to number chapter headings and subheadings in addition to providing page references. Whatever numbering system you use, be sure that it is clear and consistent throughout.

Introduction

The introduction sets the scene for the main body of the report. The aims and objectives of the report should be explained in detail. Any problems or limitations in the scope of the report should be identified, and a description of the research methods, the parameters of the research and any necessary background history should be included.

In some reports, particularly in science subjects, separate headings for **Methods** and **Results** are used prior to the main body (**Discussion**) of the report as described below.

Methods

Information under this heading may include: a list of equipment used; explanations of procedures followed; relevant information on materials or data used, including sources of materials or data and details of any necessary preparation or collection; reference to any problems encountered and subsequent changes in procedure.

Results

This section should include a summary of the results of the investigation or experiment, together with any necessary diagrams, graphs or tables of gathered data that support your results. Present your results in a logical order without comment. Discussion of your results should take place in the main body (**Discussion**) of the report.

Discussion

The main body of the report is where you discuss your material. The facts and evidence

you have gathered should be analysed and discussed with specific reference to the problem or issue. If your discussion section is lengthy, you might divide it into section sub-headings. Your points should be grouped and arranged in an order that is logical and easy to follow. Use headings and sub-headings to create a clear structure for your material. Use bullet points to present a series of points in an easy-to-follow list. As with the whole report, all sources used should be acknowledged and correctly referenced. For further guidance, check your departmental handbook and the study guide 'Referencing your work'.

Conclusion

In the conclusion you should show the overall significance of what has been covered. You may want to remind the reader of the most important points that have been made in the report or highlight what you consider to be the most central issues or findings. However, no new material should be introduced in the conclusion.

Appendices

Under this heading you should include all the supporting information you have used that is not published. This might include tables, graphs, questionnaires, surveys or transcripts. Refer to the appendices in the body of your report.

> In order to assess the popularity of this change, a questionnaire (Appendix 2) was distributed to 60 employees. The results (Appendix 3) suggest the change is well received by the majority of employees.

Bibliography

Your bibliography should list, in alphabetical order by author, all published sources referred to in your report. There are different styles of using references and bibliographies. Refer to the study guide 'Referencing your work' and check your departmental guidebook for guidelines. Texts which you consulted but did not refer to directly could be grouped under a separate heading such as 'Background reading' and listed in alphabetical order using the same format as in your bibliography.

Acknowledgements

Where appropriate, you may wish to acknowledge the assistance of particular organizations or individuals who provided information, advice or help.

Glossary of technical terms

It is useful to provide an alphabetical list of technical terms with a brief, clear description

of each term. You can also include in this section explanations of the acronyms, abbreviation or standard units used in your reports.

You will not necessarily be required to use all of the headings described above, nor will they necessarily be in the order given here. Check your departmental guidelines or instructions.

Writing the report: the essential stages

All reports need to be clear, concise and well structured. They key to writing an effective report is to allocate time for planning and preparation. With careful planning, the writing of a report will be made much easier. The essential stages of successful report writing are described below. Consider how long each stage is likely to take and divide the time before the deadline between the different stages. Be sure to leave time for final proof reading and checking.

Stage One: Understanding the report brief

This first stage is the most important. You need to be confident that you understand the purpose of your report as described in your report brief or instructions. Consider who the report is for and why it is being written. Check that you understand all the instructions or requirements, and ask your tutor if anything is unclear.

Stage Two: Gathering and selecting information

Once you are clear about the purpose of your report, you need to begin to gather relevant information. Your information may come from a variety of sources, but how much information you need will depend on how much detail is required in the report. You may want to begin by reading relevant literature to widen your understanding of the topic or issue before you go on to look at other forms of information such as questionnaires, surveys etc. As you read and gather information, you need to assess its relevance to your report and select accordingly. Keep referring to your report brief to help you decide what is relevant information.

Stage Three: Organising your material

Once you have gathered information you need to decide what will be included and in what sequence it should be presented. Begin by grouping together points that are related. These may form sections or chapters. Remember to keep referring to the report brief and be prepared to cut any information that is not directly relevant to the report. Choose an order for your material that is logical and easy to follow.

Stage Four: Analysing your material

Before you begin to write your first draft of the report, take time to consider and make

notes on the points you will make using the facts and evidence you have gathered. What conclusion can be drawn from the material? What are the limitations or flaws in the evidence? Do certain pieces of information conflict with one another? It is not enough simply to present the information you have gathered; you must relate it to the problem or issue described in the report brief.

Stage Five: Writing the report

Having organized your material into appropriate sections and headings you can begin to write the first draft of your report. You may find it easier to write the summary and contents page at the end when you know exactly what will be included. Aim for a writing style that is direct and precise. Avoid waffle and make your points clearly and concisely. Chapters, sections and even individual paragraphs should be written with a clear structure. The structure described below can be adapted and applied to chapters, sections and even paragraphs.

Introduce	the main idea of the chapter/section/paragraph.
Explain	and expand the idea, defining the key terms.
Present	relevant evidence to support your points.
Comment	on each piece of evidence showing how it relates to your points.
Conclude	your chapter/section/paragraph by either showing its significance to the report as a whole or making a link to the next chapter/section/paragraph

Stage Six: Reviewing and redrafting

Ideally, you should leave time to take a break before you review your first draft. Be prepared to rearrange or rewrite sections in the light of your review. Try to read the draft from the perspective of the reader. Is it easy to follow with a clear structure that makes sense? Are the points concisely but clearly explained and supported by relevant evidence? Writing on a word processor makes it easier to rewrite and rearrange sections or paragraphs in your first draft. If you write your first draft by hand, try writing each section on a separate piece of paper to make redrafting easier.

Stage Seven: Presentation

Once you are satisfied with the content and structure of your redrafted report, you can turn your attention to the presentation. Check that the wording of each chapter/section/subheading is clear and accurate. Check that you have adhered to the instructions in your report brief regarding format and presentation. Check for consistency in numbering of chapters, sections and appendices. Make sure that all your sources are acknowledged and correctly referenced. You will need to proof read your report for errors of spelling and grammar. If time allows, proof read more than once. Errors in presentation or expression create a poor impression and can make the report difficult to read.

Feedback

Any feedback from tutors on returned work can be used to create a checklist of key points to consider for your next report. Identify priority areas for attention and seek out further information and advice. Speak to your tutor or one of the Learning Enhancement Tutors. Used in this way, feedback from tutors can provide a useful tool for developing and improving your writing skills.

Want to know more?

If you have any further questions about this topic you can make an appointment to see a **Learning Enhancement Tutor** in the **Student Support Service**, as well as speaking to your lecturer or adviser.

☽	Call:	01603 592761
🖳	Ask:	ask.let@uea.ac.uk
🖱	Click:	https://portal.uea.ac.uk/student-support-service/learning-enhancement

There are many other resources to help you with your studies on our website.

Your comments or suggestions about our resources are very welcome.

	Scan the QR-code with a smartphone app for more resources.	**This guide is based on a study guide produced by Student Learning Development at the University of Leicester.**