



Faculty of Business and Information Technology

Guidelines for Written Assignments

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Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
PRESENTATION	1
HEADINGS	1
FONTS	1
SPACING.....	2
LAYOUT AND NUMBERING.....	2
PLANNING	2
PART ONE	3
STEPS IN THE WRITING PROCESS	3
STEP ONE STRUCTURE.....	3
STEP TWO PURPOSE	3
STEP THREE GATHER INFORMATION	3
STEP FOUR WRITE AN OUTLINE	3
STEP FIVE WRITE A FIRST DRAFT.....	3
STEP SIX CHECK YOUR FIRST DRAFT AND REWRITE.....	3
STEP SEVEN COMPLETE ANY ADDITIONAL SECTIONS	3
STEP EIGHT EDIT AND PROOFREAD.....	3
STEP NINE FINAL CHECK	3
STEP ONE STRUCTURE	4
STRUCTURE OF REPORTS	4
SHORT REPORT	4
LONG REPORT.....	5
A DIAGRAM SHOWING THE STRUCTURE OF LONG AND SHORT REPORTS	6
STRUCTURE FOR SYSTEMS PROPOSALS	7
STRUCTURE FOR ESSAYS	7
STEP TWO PURPOSE	8
STEP THREE GATHER INFORMATION	8
SOURCES OF INFORMATION.....	8
SECONDARY RESEARCH.....	8
USE THE LIBRARY	9
TAKE DETAILED NOTES	10
PRIMARY RESEARCH.....	10
TAKE MORE NOTES	11
STEP FOUR WRITE AN OUTLINE	11
MAIN POINTS	11
PUT INTO A LOGICAL ORDER.....	11
STEP FIVE WRITE A FIRST DRAFT	12
START WITH THE MIDDLE	12
AVOID PLAGIARISM	12
ACKNOWLEDGING SOURCES WITHIN BODY OF A REPORT, PROPOSAL OR ESSAY	13
SHORT QUOTATIONS.....	13
LONG QUOTATIONS	14
SOME OF THE MATERIAL IN THIS SECTION OF THE GUIDE HAS BEEN ADAPTED FROM: ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.	
AVOID JARGON AND GOBBLEDEGOOK	14
USE PLAIN ENGLISH.....	15
USING GRAPHICS	15
WRITE YOUR CONCLUSIONS	16
WRITE YOUR INTRODUCTION	16
STEP SIX CHECK YOUR FIRST DRAFT AND REWRITE	17

CHECK YOUR FACTS	17
CHECK YOUR ENGLISH	17
USE A SPELL CHECK AND A DICTIONARY	17
BEWARE OF THE APOSTROPHE.....	18
ACRONYMS	19
NUMBERS.....	19
PROOF READ AGAIN.....	19
STEP SEVEN COMPLETE ANY ADDITIONAL SECTIONS.....	20
STEP EIGHT EDIT AND PROOFREAD	20
STEP NINE FINAL CHECK.....	21
PART TWO:	22
DETAILED STRUCTURE OF REPORTS, PROPOSALS AND ESSAYS.....	22
EXAMPLE OF A SHORT REPORT	23
STRUCTURE OF A SHORT REPORT.....	26
STRUCTURE OF A LONG REPORT	26
COVER	26
TITLE PAGE	26
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS (OPTIONAL)	26
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	26
1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	27
2 INTRODUCTION.....	28
3 TERMS OF REFERENCE	28
4 PROCEDURE	28
5 FINDINGS.....	28
6 CONCLUSIONS	29
7 RECOMMENDATIONS	29
8 REFERENCES	30
9 BIBLIOGRAPHY	33
10 GLOSSARY	33
11 APPENDICES.....	33
THE STRUCTURE OF SYSTEMS PROPOSALS.....	33
COVER LETTER	34
TITLE PAGE.....	34
TABLE OF CONTENTS	34
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	34
OUTLINE OF SYSTEMS STUDY	34
DETAILED RESULTS OF SYSTEMS STUDY.....	34
SYSTEMS ALTERNATIVES	35
SYSTEMS ANALYST'S RECOMMENDATIONS	35
PROPOSAL SUMMARY	35
APPENDICES	35
THE STRUCTURE OF ESSAYS.....	36
THE FOUR SECTIONS OF AN ESSAY ARE:.....	36
INTRODUCTION.....	36
BODY.....	37
CONCLUSIONS	37
REFERENCES	37
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	37

Introduction

During your studies with the Faculty of Business and Information Technology at Whitireia Community Polytechnic you will often be asked to complete written assignments.

The purpose of this booklet is to:

1. Take you through the steps involved in completing written assignments.
2. Provide a guide to the standard required for various types of written assignments, which include reports, systems proposals or essays.

When you receive this guide you should read it through as a whole. But do not be overwhelmed by the amount of information. It is intended to act as a reference during the whole of your study period at Whitireia. You should refer to it regularly whenever you have to write an assignment. Constantly check that you have followed the suggestions in each section.

Presentation

- All assignments should be **word processed** and **printed on A4 paper**.
- Assignments should have an official Faculty of Business and Information Technology assignment cover sheet attached to the front.
- You should complete the details on the cover sheet, and sign to certify the assignment is your own work. The sheet is available from your tutor or Faculty Administration.
- Short reports or essays should be stapled once in the top left corner.
- Long reports, technical or user manuals and systems proposals should have a title page and spiral binding.

NB: If you are not sure which is required for a particular assignment ask your tutor.

Headings

- Titles and headings are easier to read in lower case, not capital letters.
- However titles should have a capital letter for the key words.
- They can be made to stand out by using bold and/or a larger font size.

NB: Elaborate fonts are difficult to read and not suitable for business or academic documents.

Fonts

- Choose a font and point size that your tutor will be able to read easily.
- Arial 12 or 14 point is a good choice for headings.
- Arial or Times Roman 12 point are good to use for the rest of the text.
- Arial 12 and 14 point have been used in this document.

NB: Never use upper case (capital letters) for your text - it is very hard to read.

Spacing

- Use single spacing between lines and double spacing between paragraphs. White space between sections helps the reader.
- Double spacing gives the tutor space to make helpful comments or suggestions if necessary.

Layout and Numbering

- For reports and systems proposals use a tabulated layout and decimal numbering system which is shown in Part Two.
- All pages should be numbered.

Planning

With any assignment you need to plan well ahead of the due date. As you read through Part one of the guide, **Steps in the Writing Process**, you will realise that planning and preparation are just as important as the writing. Careful checking of the structure of a particular assignment at the beginning and proofreading and editing when you think you have finished are equally essential.

A major assignment cannot be written overnight at the last minute. To be a professional piece of work it needs to be planned, written, checked and rewritten over a period of time.

If you reach a point where you are not making any progress it is always a good idea to put the assignment aside. Do something else and come back to it later, or even the next day when you feel fresher. It is surprising how often new ideas and solutions will then come to you. However, to do this you have to be working well ahead of your deadline.

We will now look at the nine steps in the writing process. Following these steps should make your writing a simpler and more enjoyable task. It will also give you a sense of achievement as you can tick off each step in turn to monitor your progress.

Part One

Steps in the Writing Process

When you are writing an assignment, whether it is a report, proposal or essay there are a number of steps which will help you through the process. The steps before and after the actual writing are just as important as the writing itself. Give yourself plenty of time to follow all of these steps.

The steps are listed here. Each step will then be explained in greater detail on the following pages.

Step One Structure

Ensure you are clear about the structure of the report, proposal or essay you are required to produce.

Step Two Purpose

State clearly the purpose of your report or proposal.

or

Analyse the question if you are writing an essay.

Step Three Gather information

Collect your information. Take detailed notes.

Step Four Write an Outline

Write out main points and prepare an outline.

Step Five Write a First draft

Write a first draft. Ensure references are given for all sources of information, including graphics.

Step Six Check Your First Draft and Rewrite

Check your facts. Check your English.

Step Seven Complete any Additional Sections

Complete any additional sections, eg Appendices.

Step Eight Edit and proofread

Edit, proofread and correct the entire assignment.

Step Nine Final check

Carry out a final check and repeat Step 8.

Step One Structure

A report, proposal or essay has to be structured correctly. Each one has different requirements. Before you begin work **ensure that you know the correct structure.**

It is important to keep the structure in mind as you work through the nine steps in the writing process.

In Section Two of this booklet you will find detailed structures and models for the most common written assignments you are expected to complete while studying in the Faculty of Business and Information Technology.

The structures are shown briefly here so that you know which model to turn to in Section Two.

Structure of Reports

Writing reports is an essential business skill. Report writing is taught in some detail in the following courses:

Bachelor of Information Technology IT101 Communication Studies

NZ Diploma in Business 140 Business Communication

BC500 Business Communication

You should learn the structure of both short and long reports in these courses.

Many other papers taught in the Faculty require you to produce a written report as part of the formal assessment. The report format taught in the above courses should be used when you prepare a report for more advanced level papers. Check with your tutor which model you are expected to use.

The structure of a report is determined by the required length. For both types of report you should use a decimal numbering system.

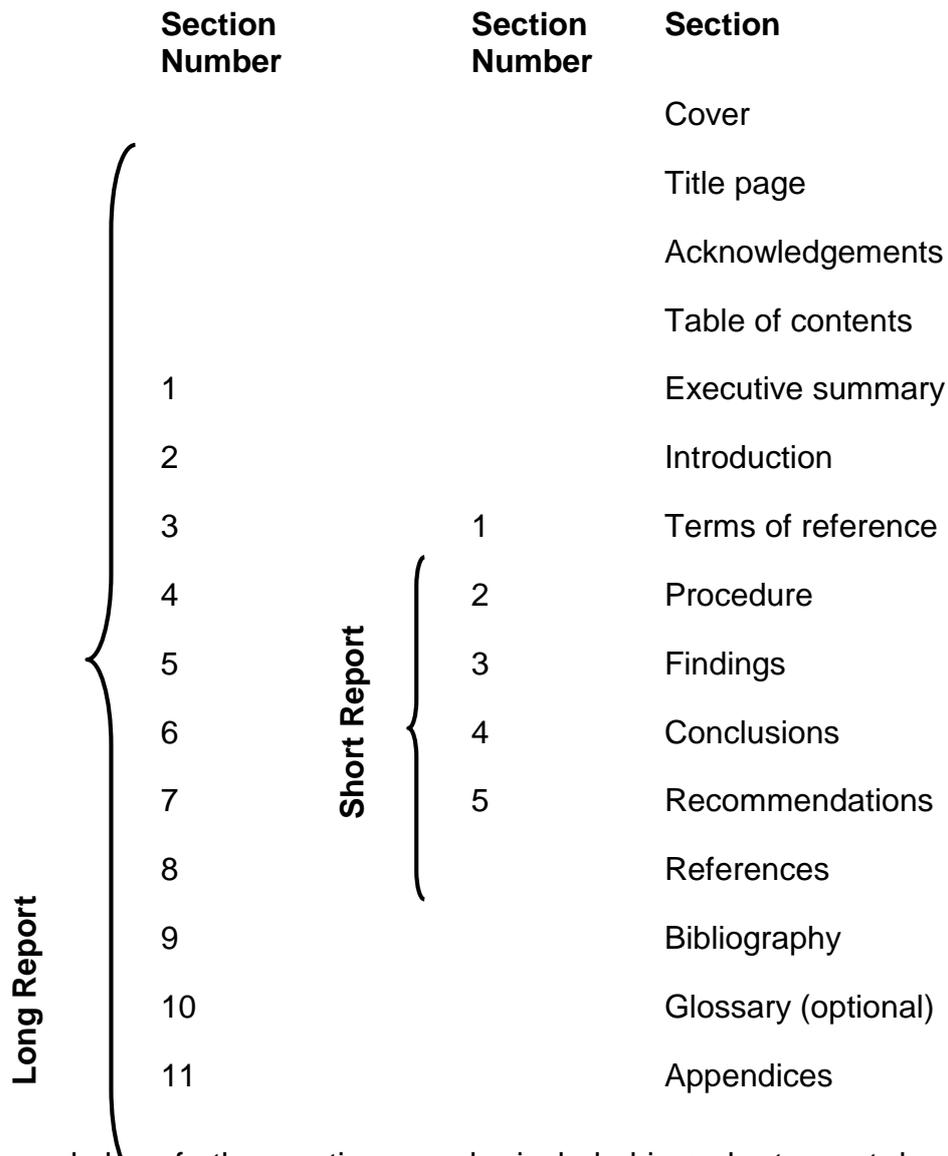
Short Report

- A short report should include five sections as shown in the following diagram.
- It may be based on a case study you have been given.
- To write this report you may not have to carry out any further research of your own.
- It is an exercise in report writing, ensuring that you understand the structure, are able to group material logically, reach conclusions and decide on recommendations which are practical and actionable.
- In a short report the numbering should start with the Terms of Reference.

Long Report

- A long report may include all the sections shown in the diagram.
- A long report usually involves additional research. This can include:
 - Secondary research from your reading;and/or
 - Primary research, which may involve you in preparing a questionnaire, carrying out a survey, interviewing people or making observations.
- In a long report the numbering should start with the Executive Summary.

A Diagram Showing the Structure of Long and Short Reports



In the workplace further sections can be included in a short report depending on the purpose of the report. For example, even though a report is short, you may be required to carry out a small piece of research, such as a survey. It may be appropriate to include Appendices with supporting information in this case. An Executive Summary and a Title Page for presentation purposes may also be added.

BInfoTech students completing IT301 should note that there is a separate Systems Handbook containing detailed information about the reports required for this module.

Structure for Systems Proposals

A systems proposal varies from a long report but has several common elements. It should consist of the following ten sections. As with long reports, the decimal numbering system should start with the Executive Summary.

- Cover Letter
- Title page
- Table of Contents
- 1 Executive Summary (including recommendations)
- 2 Outline of Systems Study with Appropriate Documentation
- 3 Detailed Results of the Systems Study
- 4 Systems Alternatives (three or four possible solutions)
- 5 Systems Analyst's Recommendations
- 6 Proposal Summary
- 7 Appendices (assorted documentation, summary of phases, correspondence, and references, and so on)

The Systems Proposal is a summary of a systems analyst's work in business up to that point. It involves putting forward alternative solutions to a real business problem. Information has to be collected from the chosen workplace and then written for the client in a clear and logical manner. (Kendall & Kendall, 2002) A professional writing style is essential. Although some of the writing may be quite technical, jargon must be avoided. Any intelligent layperson should be able to understand the proposal.

It is expected that tables, graphs and/or charts are used in the proposal to present and analyse the data. A table, graph and/or chart should never be inserted in the text without a written explanation.

Detailed notes on the above sections also can be found in Part Two.

Structure for Essays

An essay consists of four sections:

- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusions
- References

The body of an essay contains your research and is similar to the Findings in a report.

Step Two Purpose

Your report or proposal should be a very precise document. It is written to solve a defined problem. **You cannot start work until you are sure about your purpose.** Think it through very carefully.

You should be able to **write your purpose clearly in one or two short sentences.** This is not time wasted. These sentences will be used later as part of the Terms of Reference in a report or the Outline of a Systems Proposal.

An essay title or topic is always asking a question, even if it is not written as one.

There is no point in writing a great assignment if it wanders away from the topic and fails to answer the question. Take some time to **analyse the question** so that you are sure about what is required. Read the title through and underline the key words. It can help to read the question aloud to yourself.

As you analyse the question, you will understand which type of essay you are expected to write, a descriptive or discussion essay.

Step Three Gather Information

Once you have analysed your purpose or the question being asked, decide **what information you need and where you can find it.**

Sources of Information

Information can come from many different sources. As already mentioned above, two types of research are usually involved in written assignments: secondary research and primary research.

Secondary Research

Secondary research is where you rely entirely on **previously published** material for your information or to support your arguments. It will be used in either descriptive or discussion essays. In a long report or proposal secondary data may give weight to your primary research. It can be used in the workplace for an informative report, a version of a short report which provides information pertaining to the place of work, such as monthly sales figures or annual reports.

Some common sources of secondary information are:

- Course textbooks and notes
- Recommended reading lists
- Newspapers and magazines
- Journals
- Company records

- Internet
- CDROM
- Government agencies such as Statistics New Zealand, or Local Authorities
- Local organisations such as Small Business Associations, Citizens' Advice Bureaux etc (when you are using their own published material)

Use the Library

The Polytechnic Library provides most of the books and journals that you will need for your assignments. It also provides on-line access to a number of catalogues and databases.

You may have access to the on-line services from anywhere on campus, or from home if you have an Internet connection. At present you may need a password for some databases which the librarians can provide.

Librarians can show you how to use the databases.

Services include:

On-line Library Catalogue

The catalogue has a record of material held in the libraries at all campuses. You may request items and reserve books.

On-line Databases which include:

- Index New Zealand
This is an index of newspapers and periodicals, regular weekly or monthly magazines such as Marketing Magazine or ComputerWorld. You can search by author, title, or subject, and it will bring up all information held. The librarians can then request this information for you, if it is held by another library.
- Brooker's Online, including New Zealand Statutes, Regulations, Case Law Digest, Local and Private Acts
- CCH Tax Library
- EBSCO: Australia/NZ Reference Centre, containing NZ and Australian newspapers, magazines and reference books
- Knowledge Basket, a range of full-text newspapers and periodicals
- Statistics New Zealand
- Te Puna, the National Library of New Zealand service of bibliographic references for New Zealand and overseas resources held in NZ libraries, and a Maori thesaurus

The library also has online connections to other databases providing information on books and journals that are held by libraries all over New Zealand. A limited number of books can be requested from these libraries through the interloan service.

Ensure that you give the librarians time to provide these services.

Your local public library is a good source of information. You need to be a member to borrow books but anyone can use its reference section. A special agreement enables Whitireia students from any campus to join Porirua City Library.

Take Detailed Notes

As you collect your material make notes on information relevant to your purpose or question. Do not become sidetracked into reading or researching anything that is not relevant no matter how interesting it might be!

Keep your notes tidy and ordered. Collect them in a file or notebook, not on separate scraps of paper. Always write down where the information came from and include these details;

- author
- title
- page or pages the information came from
- date of publication
- publisher's name
- place where it was published
- the number, volume and date of a journal
- the name of the CD-ROM
- the address of the website if the information is from the Internet and details of sources
- the name of the database

It is most important to keep accurate notes of any quotations you wish to use and full details of the publications where they appeared. When you come to write your report or essay you will have to give references for this material and list all publications referred to in a bibliography. There is more important information on referencing in Part Two of this booklet.

Primary Research

Most long reports written for business and systems proposals are based mainly on primary research. However they can have references to published material, such as a previously published journal article, archival data or company records relevant to a particular topic.

Primary research involves collecting first hand information through interviews, questionnaires, surveys, observation or experiment.

You should be clear about your methodology and how it fits your purpose before you proceed.

All primary research methods should be discussed with and approved by your tutor. Your tutor will need to see all questionnaires, discuss the size of your sample, and the way in which people in your sample are to be selected. Similarly open-ended interview questions will also need prior approval.

When interviewing people always ask if you can telephone them later if any facts need checking.

Take More Notes

As with the secondary research you need to keep detailed notes. You need to include:

- The date when a questionnaire was conducted
- How many people took part
- Or a list of people interviewed in more depth, can be included in your appendices.

If you are carrying out in-depth interviewing of people you have to take careful notes and keep them for checking later. It may be helpful to use a tape recorder for long interviews, but remember transcribing a tape can be a lengthy task.

Step Four Write an Outline

A lot of students find writing assignments very difficult because they miss this stage out all together and try to start writing. The result is usually “writer’s block”! The outline provides the skeleton of the report, proposal or essay and needs to be developed before you start writing.

As you write the outline will keep you on track. From your outline you will know which section you are able to write next. You may not write everything in a chronological order, but the outline will help you piece it together logically.

Read through your notes of the information you have gathered always keeping in mind the purpose or question.

Main Points

First highlight the main points in your notes.

Next write them out either:

- on separate cards
- as a list
- or as a mind map.

Cards can be very useful when you begin because you can move them around until you get the order into a satisfactory logical sequence.

Put into a logical order

To work out a logical order try to group together main points that go together. Should some points come first followed by others? A pattern should emerge that seems the best way to answer the question. Seek help from others (classmates, peer tutors, tutors) if you find this task is difficult.

In a discussion essay and in many reports quotations and information, which support one side of the question, or one argument, should be presented together. Then information supporting the other side of the question or an alternative view should be presented.

As you proceed you may find some points do not fit in at all. Discard them if they are not relevant to your question.

Once you are satisfied that you have a logical order you can write out the main points.

This is the outline for your essay or report. It will be developed into the main body of your assignment.

Step Five Write a First Draft

All written work should have a middle, a beginning, and an end.

Start with the middle

You always write the middle first. The middle becomes the **Findings** in a **report**, or it forms the '**body**' of an **essay**. It will contain all the relevant information you have gathered and put into a logical order in your outline.

To start writing you have to 'flesh out' your outline, writing up more fully and in complete sentences the information you have gathered in note form. In a good outline you will already have collected together the points which go together as described in Step Four. Build on this to complete the body of your essay, develop your arguments or support the purpose of your report.

The key points you identified for your outline may be ideal as sub-headings in the Findings section of a report. Sub headings are not always used in essays, but they do help to keep you focussed. Check with your tutor whether they are appropriate for your particular essay. If not, use them while you are writing your first draft and delete them for the final version.

The Findings, or body, never contain opinions. They are based on your research or on the information provided in a case study for a short report. The facts which support different sides of a discussion, or are relevant to your purpose, should be stated objectively. You are reporting the **FACTS**, not giving your opinion at this stage.

Avoid Plagiarism

Failure to acknowledge a source of information, or using other people's ideas as your own, is called plagiarism. You must never copy directly from a book, journal, or the Internet, without citing the source of the information. You should never copy the work of another student or former student. You should never submit an assignment which has been prepared by another person and given or sold to you or acquired from the Internet.

The above practices are a serious form of academic dishonesty. At Whitireia Community Polytechnic, plagiarism is a "dishonest practice" which could result in disciplinary actions against an offending student.

Please Note:

It is particularly easy now to access a wide range of information through Web pages. It is acceptable to acknowledge the source and use this material, either in quotes or rephrased in your own words. However it is definitely **not** acceptable to "cut and paste" material directly into assignments and give the impression it is your own work.

As you write you must state where each piece of information came from. It is most important that there is a reference for every bit of your research. For both business reports and academic essays the formatting conventions of the American Psychological Association (APA) are used for setting out references.

In the body of your report or essay it is important to acknowledge the source of all material cited in your report. 'Cited' means that a piece of paraphrasing, a summary or a direct quotation has been included in the text. Sources of information should be acknowledged for the following reasons:

- To distinguish between your ideas and someone else's
- To show readers the range and quality of your reading
- To direct readers to the sources used if they want further information.

You should not overuse quotations and never use them as a substitute for your own argument.

Acknowledging sources within the body of a report, proposal or essay

As you write you can cite the authors whose work you are referring to in various ways. Phrases like the following will help to make your writing flow:

A recent survey (Jones, 2007) has shown that...
Jones in a recent survey (2007) has shown that...
...has increased according to Jones (2007)

The relevant work by Jones will then be referenced in full according to the APA standard in the references and bibliography sections.

Short quotations

If you wish to include short, direct quotations of **less than 40 words** simply run them into the text using quotation marks and a citation which includes the author's last name, the year of publication and a page number.

Many authors believe that business communication should be based on 'an examination of theory' (Hogwash, 1996, p. 24). However, new evidence.....

Alternatively

Hogwash (1996) states that business communication should be based on 'an examination of theory' (p.24).

Long quotations

Long quotations (**more than 40 words** from the original text) are:

- indented five spaces from the left-hand margin,
- typed in double spacing,
- not enclosed in inverted commas,
- cited and a line is left before and after the quote to separate it from the rest of the report.

The effectiveness of the Business Communication course is best measured by the resultant skills of the students. This measurement should include reference to speaking, thinking, writing, listening and group skills. These skills should be measured in an applied setting, not simply a regurgitation of fact and theory

(Loadleiter, 1995, p.6).

It is obvious from this analysis ...

Or

Loadleiter (1995) states:

The effectiveness of the Business Communication course is best measured by the resultant skills of the students. This measurement should include reference to speaking, thinking, writing, listening and group skills. These skills should be measured in an applied setting, not simply a regurgitation of fact and theory (p.6).

It is obvious from this analysis ...

A full reference for all sources cited in the report should be given in the reference section of your document.

Refer to Section 8 pages 30 – 33 for information on writing full references.

Avoid Jargon and Gobbledegook

Many people think they are demonstrating their knowledge by using a lot of technical terms when writing assignments. Or they may try to impress by writing gobbledegook -- long involved sentences, containing excessive technical or legal jargon.

In fact they are not impressing anyone. They are confusing the reader and probably annoying the tutor who has to mark to assignment.

While business and academic writing has to be professional in style, it also has to be readable. A general reader, with no specific technical knowledge, should be able to understand any assignment you write.

Use Plain English

Your words should be chosen for their appropriateness in the context of your topic, not because you think a long word looks better than a shorter word. If technical terms have to be used, they should be explained clearly in everyday language both in the text and in a Glossary.

Aim to write clear, concise sentences. As a general rule sentences should not exceed about 20 words in length. There can be exceptions to this, but not too many.

Using Graphics

Many report and proposals contain information which can be enhanced by the effective use of graphics.

The aim of using graphics is to clarify complex material. They are intended to help the presentation and analysis of material.

Do not overload your assignment with them. Pages and pages of charts may leave the reader more confused. As with all your information, you have to be selective. Choose carefully which graphics you want to incorporate in your text. Any additional ones, which are relevant, can be included later in an appendix.

When deciding on an appropriate graphic consider the information you wish to illustrate. Quantitative findings, such as the results of a survey or questionnaire can be summarised concisely in a table and/or a bar chart. Percentages can often be seen more clearly when a pie chart is used.

Photographs, diagrams or maps may also be appropriate in some cases.

Whatever graphic you decide to use it is important that you take note of the following golden rules:

- Always give the graphic a title which explains what information it contains:
For example:
A bar chart showing the amount of money borrowed by New Zealand students in the years 2000-2004.
- Always place the graphic as near to the section of text it is illustrating as possible.
- Always include a written interpretation in the body of your work.
The interpretation should state:
What exactly is illustrated
Where the information came from
What are the main points or trends
- Always give a full reference for graphics taken from a secondary source.

Write Your Conclusions

Conclusions are the part of the writing where you do state your own point of view. This is the subjective part of your work – your own opinion.

In a simple descriptive essay, or an informative report, the Conclusions are a final summary where you emphasise what you consider to be the most important facts.

In all other documents, the Conclusions are where you state your opinion, always referring to the title or purpose of the essay or report. It is saying what you think about the material you have collected through your research. It is important because it demonstrates your ability to understand your research and select material or arguments which seem the most convincing.

Your Conclusions must be based on the evidence you have collected and written about in the Findings or body. You cannot introduce new material at this stage. Nor can you have an opinion which bears no relation to the research you have carried out.

In a report or proposal you will have to base recommendations which are practical and actionable on your conclusions.

Write your Introduction

The Introduction to a report or an essay usually provides the background to the situation or the history of the problem. It also contains a brief explanation of how the argument or discussion in the Findings or body will be developed.

In other words, it is a brief guide through your work. Because it is a guide to the structure of your body and conclusions, you cannot write it until those sections are completed. **Do not make the mistake of trying to start with an Introduction.**

All other sections of reports are added later in Step Seven and are described in detail in Part Two.

Step Six Check Your First Draft and Rewrite

Checking and rechecking is an important part of the writing process. This is another reason why you should always be working well ahead of your deadline. What do you need to check?

Check Your Facts

Check your quotations and references against your notes. You may need to check some of your sources and make sure all your references are correct. The spelling of the names of authors should also be checked carefully. If they are unusual names, ask a friend to read the letters out aloud to you.

If you see something you are not sure about, go back to your source and check it. This applies to your primary research as well as to information collected from secondary sources.

Trust your instincts. If something sounds or feels wrong, do not hope for the best and ignore it. Do think “she’ll be right”– check it.

Check Your English

No matter how good your research and ideas are, if your work is carelessly written, it will not be satisfactory. The time you allow for proof reading and rewriting is as important as your original research.

Read through the draft as a whole to check for meaning first of all. Then read through it again to check that your writing flows, that sentences and paragraphs follow logically from the previous ones.

At this point you may need to do some serious rewriting.

Read through the rewritten draft and check for the above points again. Once you are satisfied it is time for the more detailed proof reading.

Use a spell check and a dictionary

If you have not already done so, run a spell check over your work. You will need to refer to a dictionary as well.

Sometimes a spell check does not pick up a word, because it is spelt correctly, but is used in the wrong context. Simple grammatical errors like confusing ‘there’ and ‘their’ or ‘where’ and ‘were’ come into this category. Or you may have left the “d” off the word “and” when typing. The spellchecker recognises the resulting “an” as a word and will not pick up your mistake.

If your English is not up to spotting these errors you need to seek extra help. The grammar check on the word processing programmes is not a reliable guide and can cause extra confusion.

Beware of the apostrophe

The apostrophe has become such a source of confusion these days that it is better avoided wherever possible.

The apostrophe has two purposes.

- 1 The first is to show where a letter or letters are missing from a contracted word such as 'don't' for 'do not' or 'there's' for 'there is'.

Contracted words or phrases are often **not** really appropriate in business English so it is better to avoid them altogether. You will then be sure of avoiding common mistakes. Always use the full phrase - We have...You are....The company is....The manager did not... - instead of the contractions - We've....You're....The company's.....The manager didn't...etc.

The most common error with apostrophes is the word 'it's' 'It's' simply means 'it is'. Nothing else. Whenever you need to write 'it is', write it out in full, **do not** use 'it's'.

The word 'its' does **not** have an apostrophe. It is a pronoun used in similar circumstances to his or her. The dog hurt its leg. The man hurt his leg, The woman hurt her arm. No apostrophes necessary.

The rule is: **Avoid contracted words. Always write 'it is' out in full. Never put an apostrophe into 'its'.**

- 2 The second purpose of the apostrophe is to show possession.

When an apostrophe is used to show possession it can only be used on a noun, a naming word. To check whether a word is a noun try to put the definite article 'the' or the indefinite articles 'a' or 'an' in front of it. If you cannot do this it is not a noun. So an apostrophe should be used in a phrase like 'The book's cover', which means 'the cover of the book'. If you cannot turn the phrase round using 'of the' it should not have an apostrophe.

Plural nouns do not require apostrophes when they are used simply as plurals – 'The books are on the table', fish and chips', 'too many students have big loans'.

When a plural noun is showing possession the apostrophe comes after the 's' as in a phrase like 'the students' loans are getting out of control'. This means 'the loans of the students are getting out of control' – more than one student.

The rule is **The apostrophe to show possession can only be used on nouns.**

Acronyms

Acronyms are abbreviations for long names or titles. For example; NZ for New Zealand, and LAN for Local Area Network. You can use acronyms in your assignments but be careful not to confuse or lose your reader by using too many unfamiliar ones. Some names which take acronyms may need explaining in a glossary.

The first time you use an acronym, give the full title first with the acronym in brackets like this:

Twenty users are connected to this Local Area Network (LAN).

After the first time you can just use just the acronym.

Print acronyms without spaces or stops, for example:

LAN not L A N or L.A.N.

Numbers

The general rule is to write numbers below 10 as words and to use numerals for numbers 10 and above. For example:

"The eight people seated around the boardroom table all agreed that at least 25 staff would need to be transferred to another site."

However, when a number appears at the beginning of a sentence it is preferable to write it out as a word. For example:

Twenty users are connected to this LAN.

Proof Read Again

Detailed proof reading means examining each sentence very carefully. One way to do this is to read through your work, sentence by sentence working from the end back to the beginning. By doing this you will read the words you have actually written, not what you think you have written.

As you check your spelling and grammar correct your mistakes and rewrite sentences where necessary.

Step Seven Complete Any Additional Sections

An essay will need only one additional section – a list of References of all the authors and their publications cited in your essay.

Proposals and reports have a number of additional sections, depending on their length.

As with the Introduction, they are not necessarily written in the order in which they appear in the final report.

For example the Executive Summary comes at the beginning of the report but you must write the Recommendations first. You cannot write an Executive Summary until your Conclusions and Recommendations have been completed as it must contain a summary of your Recommendations.

Refer to the detailed notes in Section Two of this booklet to see what to include in each section and which sections are required for your particular piece of work.

Step Eight Edit and proofread

The whole assignment now has to be re-read. Proof reading at this stage includes checking that all works cited are listed correctly in the References Section.

Finally ask the following questions:

- Does the report or proposal meet its purpose?
- Does the essay answer the question?
- Does the assignment include relevant information?
- Does it contain 'padding' to make your assignment seem longer, which is not necessary? If so delete it.
- Are all sources of information clearly cited in the correct style?
- Is the language simple, clear and easy to understand, with no technical jargon or gobbledegook?
- Are the sentences generally short?
- Is there only one topic in each sentence?
- Are the paragraphs grouped in a logical order?
- Are they linked to one another so that there is a logical flow?
- Do the Conclusions follow logically from the information collection?
- Do the Recommendations arise from the Conclusions?
- Are the Recommendations specific and actionable?

Once you have made any necessary further corrections you have to go to Step Nine.

Step Nine Final check

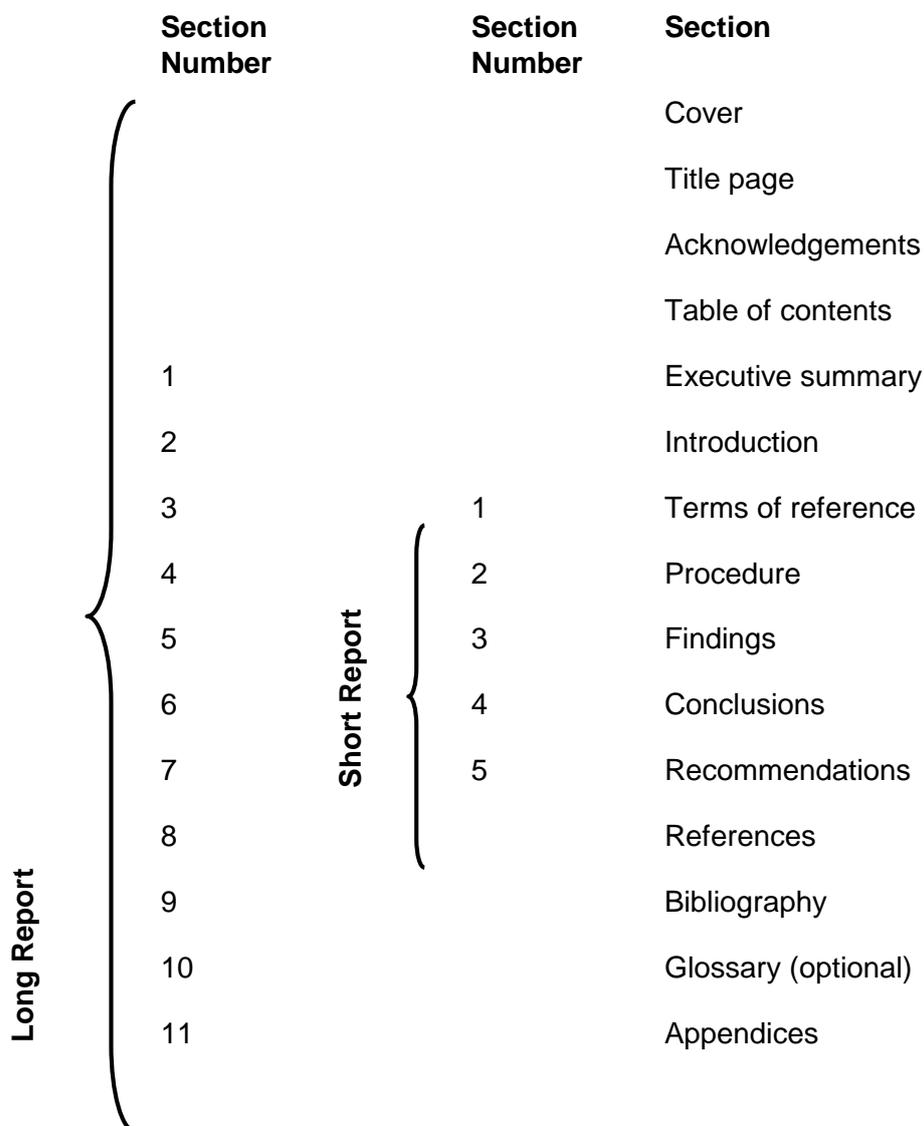
Every time you make changes, no matter how small, you have to go back and re-read to ensure that your writing flows and that the meaning is clear. If new sentences have been inserted, they will need proof-reading.

You may repeat these last two stages several times.

Part Two:

Detailed Structure of Reports, Proposals and Essays

The Diagram Showing the Structure of Long and Short Reports is shown again here. The following notes give further information on the different components. The model shows how a tabulated layout and decimal numbering system should be used.



Example of a Short Report

ABC Business Limited

To: Jude Jones, Office Manager

From: Jean White, Team Leader

Date: 5 March 2008

Subject: **Office Accidents and General Safety**

1 Terms of Reference

On 1 February 2008 Jude Jones, the Office Manager, requested a report on accidents which have occurred in the office during the period 1 February to 28 February 2008 and on other aspects of office safety observed and reported on during this time.

This report is due, with recommendations, on 5 March 2008.

2 Procedure

- 2.1 Discussions with two staff members; James Jones on 3 February 2008 and Alan Shaw on 4 February 2008.
- 2.2 Written accounts, in the Safety Officer's file, of specific incidents during February
- 2.3 Observation of the office during the period 1 February to 28 February 2008

3 Findings

3.1 Accidents involving members of the public

- 3.1.1 On 5 February a visitor was badly bruised when a swing door was pushed into him by a staff member even though the door was clearly marked 'Pull to Open'.
- 3.1.2 On 15 February an elderly person was knocked over by a staff member who was running down one of the passages.

3.2 Lifting and carrying

- 3.2.1 On 27 February a member of staff fell down some stairs and broke an ankle whilst carrying large boxes of paper files.
- 3.2.2 Individual staff were observed carrying computers and other heavy items.

3.3 Carrying hot drinks

3.3.1 On 18 February there was an accident involving two staff members. One was carrying a polystyrene cup filled with hot coffee when the two collided. The coffee drinker's hand was scalded and required first aid treatment. The other person's suit was sprayed with coffee and required dry cleaning.

3.3.2 It has been observed that coffee is often spilt on the vinyl in the corridors when staff are carrying cups of coffee from the canteen to the offices. This makes the vinyl floors very slippery underfoot.

3.4 Open Drawers

During February it was frequently observed that staff members left cabinet and desk drawers open.

3.5 Minor Injuries

During February there have been minor accidents involving pins, stapling machines, guillotines and other office machinery.

4 Conclusions

4.1 Accidents involving members of the public

It is obvious that some staff are unaware of even the most basic safety precautions when moving about our offices. Their carelessness has involved members of the public, which is bad for public relations.

4.2 Lifting and carrying

Many staff members are lifting and carrying, or attempting to lift and carry loads, which are either too large or too heavy for one person. The potential for injury from this practice is considerable.

4.3 Carrying hot drinks

The practice of carrying hot drinks from the staff canteen to the offices is potentially dangerous both to the carrier and other staff members.

4.4 Open drawers

This practice is extremely dangerous and could result in an injury, especially when staff have to move around an office.

4.5 Minor injuries

Staff are not taking full care when using even basic office equipment.

5 Recommendations

It is recommended that:

5.1 Prevention of injury to members of the public

- 5.1.1 All swing doors are modified to open one way only with appropriate notices on either side (ie: 'Push' or 'Pull' to open).
- 5.1.2 All doors are fitted with a glass panel (or panels) to enable staff to see if someone is on the other side.
- 5.1.3 Large "Walk Don't Run" notices are posted prominently in all passages.

5.2 Lifting and carrying

- 5.2.1 A memo is sent to all staff pointing out the dangers of attempting to lift large and/or heavy loads.
- 5.2.2 This memo directs staff to get help from a colleague when a large and/or heavy load is to be lifted.
- 5.2.3 A trolley is purchased to enable staff to move large and/or heavy loads from one location to the other.

5.3 Hot drink dispenser

- 5.3.1 An automatic hot drink dispenser is installed in the office.
- 5.3.2 A memo is sent to all staff informing them of the dispenser and requesting that they do not carry hot drinks from the canteen.

5.4 'Close Drawer' notices

- 5.4.1 Eye-catching stand-up notices, with the words 'Please Close All Drawers' written in bold lettering, are placed on all filing cabinets and desks.

5.5 Minor injury prevention

- 5.5.1 Basic instruction in the use of all office equipment and machinery, however simple, is part of the introductory programme for new staff.

Signed _____ Date _____

Structure of a Short Report

The short report exercise you write for Business Communication courses will probably be based on a case study, similar to the one shown above. If so, you should use only the information provided, and base your Conclusions and Recommendations on that information.

You have learned the format for a very useful report and can adapt this to later assignments, and to small projects you are asked to complete when you are working.

As shown in the diagram, there are not as many components as in the long report. The ones used have the same function but remember they are numbered differently.

In the workplace further sections can be included in a short report depending on the purpose of the report. For example, even though a report is short, you may be required to carry out a small piece of research, such as a survey. It may be appropriate to include Appendices with supporting information in this case. An Executive Summary and a Title Page for presentation purposes may also be added.

The function of all parts of both types of report are fully explained in the next section.

Structure of a Long Report

Cover

The cover provides quick identification of the content and protection for the inner pages. It should have a bold, concise title.

Title page

The title should be specific as reports are filed by title. The title should adequately describe the report and there should be no attempt to shorten it to newspaper headline form or to be gimmicky. But try to write an interesting title because it is aimed to attract the reader's attention to your work.

The title page shows the name of the project, the name of the author, or team members involved, and date it is submitted. Keep this page plain, clipart is not appropriate for business documents.

Acknowledgments (Optional)

If there is someone you would particularly like to thank, this is where you do it.

Table of contents

This not only directs the reader to the page where they can obtain specific information, but also gives a quick survey of the structure and form of the report. List the headings exactly as they appear in the body of the report.

1 Executive summary

You must take great care in writing the Executive Summary. It can only be written when everything else is complete.

It should give a brief statement of the aim and contents of the report, be written in formal, objective, non-emotional language and must cover not only **findings** but also **conclusions** and **recommendations** in the same order as in the report.

The summary is for the reader who is busy and wants to know quickly what is going on and what the recommendations are.

Paragraph your summary, but do not use a numbering system. Executive summaries are normally no more than 10% of the length of the report and are created after the rest of the report has been written.

If the example of the short report on office accidents and general safety shown above were a long report, you would include an executive summary as follows:

1.1 Executive Summary

This report investigates accidents which occurred in the office during February 2005 and looks at other aspects of office safety. Information was obtained through personal observation, discussions with staff and checking the Safety Officer's file.

It was found that:

- There were two accidents involving members of the public.
- One serious accident was caused by individual staff lifting heavy and bulky items.
- At least one accident had resulted from the widespread practice of carrying hot drinks from the canteen to the office.
- Cabinet and desk drawers were frequently left open.
- Some staff incurred minor injuries when using basic office equipment.

It is concluded that poor safety practices by some staff not only cause injury to themselves and/or others, but also have the potential to cause injury.

Recommendations have been made in the following areas:

- Modifications to swing doors.
- 'Walk don't run' notices in passages/corridors.
- Getting assistance for lifting and the purchase of a trolley for moving heavy or bulky objects.
- The purchase of a hot drink dispenser.
- 'Close drawer' notices.

- Basic office equipment training.

2 Introduction

Formal reports usually contain a section that gives the background of the situation or the history of the problem. Even though the current reader will probably know the background, reports are filed and sometimes consulted years later.

In the Introduction you tell the readers how the discussion in the body of the report will be developed.

3 Terms of Reference

These cover precise instructions about the scope and purpose of the report. You must state:

- When the report was requested
- Who asked for the report
- The title and purpose of the report
- When the report is due

A report should be a very precise piece of writing. It is produced solely to answer a defined question or to solve a defined problem. The Terms of Reference must, therefore, be exact and you must keep to them precisely. Anything outside the range of the Terms of Reference has no place in your report.

4 Procedure

This is an explanation of how the information in the Findings section was obtained. It explains precisely what methods were used.

It should be specific, stating not just 'interviews' but how many interviews you conducted and with whom. Use the passive voice, eg: Interviews were conducted with ...A survey was carried out on a sample of 50 people, chosen at random from the phone book....

Any secondary research, whether it is background material collected from text books or journals, or data from company records, should also be mentioned.

5 Findings

This is the longest section of your report. It must be organised logically and you should use a tabulated layout, as demonstrated in the short report example. This will clarify the order. Use a new paragraph and number for each different subtopic.

Make it user-friendly by subdividing it into smaller parts each with a helpful, informative heading. Your headings should be short, neutral summaries of the content, giving no opinions. Ensure that you have a new heading and number for each new topic or subtopic. The short report example is a good model of numbering and sub-headings should be used.

Remember to group together items which belong to same category. The main points from your outline should help you decide on your headings.

The content of the Findings should always be objective. They should contain information clearly stated without judgement. They should present relevant evidence, collected from your research, in a clear, logical manner.

The Findings should be written in complete sentences that are concise and professional in tone.

6 Conclusions

The Conclusions summarise the evidence and state your interpretation or opinion about the relative importance of the facts stated in your Findings.

You must not introduce new material here.

The Conclusions should follow logically from the Findings and should lead logically into the Recommendations. Conclusions are usually presented in paragraphs, but you could also use a numbered list.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations should follow through logically from Conclusions. They should be:

- specific and actionable
- contain practical, feasible suggestions to improve the situation
- or solve any problems raised in the Conclusions

They must be impersonal in wording, though the ideas may be subjective, your own personal views.

Recommendations should be numbered to make it easy for people to discuss them. They should make it quite clear how many actions are required of staff and precisely what they are.

The Recommendations in the model short report are a good example. Extracts shown here are an example of specific and actionable recommendations. They are numbered **5** because they are taken from a short report.

5 Recommendations

It is recommended that:

5.1 Prevention of Injury

5.1.1 Large “Walk Don’t Run” notices are posted prominently in all passages.

5.2 Lifting and carrying

5.2.1 A memo is sent to all staff pointing out the dangers of attempting to lift large and/or heavy loads.

5.2.2 This memo directs staff to get help from a colleague when a large and/or heavy load is to be lifted.

5.2.3 A trolley is purchased to enable staff to move large and/or heavy loads from one location to the other.

5.3 'Close Drawer' notices

5.3.1 Eye-catching stand-up notices, with the words 'Please Close All Drawers' written in bold lettering, are placed on all filing cabinets and desks.

Compare them with the following:

5.1 Staff must not run in the office

5.2 Staff are not to carry heavy objects

5.3 Filing cabinet drawers are to be closed after their use.

These three Recommendations are all unacceptable because the staff is not told how they are to be actioned.

Some companies ask staff to put the Recommendations at the front of the report, as this is the most important section. However, Recommendations at the end is the standard required by Whitireia Community Polytechnic.

At the end of your Recommendations include your **Signature** with your name typed underneath and the **date** you signed it. The person who signs is responsible for the accuracy of the Findings. Unsigned reports are irresponsible.

8 References

Referencing is an important part of all academic work and your report must contain a list of all references cited or quoted in your report.

Most businesses use the formatting conventions of the American Psychological Association (APA) for setting out references.

The Reference section of a report lists all the sources that have been cited in your report.

The Bibliography section of a report lists all the sources that you have read while preparing the report, but you have not cited or quoted from them in the report.

The list of references should include all written materials consulted (books, newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, internet articles etc).

Reference lists are arranged alphabetically by authors' surnames or the first word in the reference. If there is no author, and the entry begins with an article (a, an or the), use the first letter of the second word.

A hanging indentation should be made for each entry.

Examples of correct APA referencing follow.

8.1 Books

When the book is written by a single author:

Sligo, F. (1991). *Organisational behaviour: Case studies and commentaries*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.

When it is a later edition by a single author:

May, C. (1992). *Effective writing: A handbook for accountants*. (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

When there are two authors:

Strunk, W., & White, E. B. (1979). *The elements of style*. (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan.

When it is a Corporate publication:

Ministry of Youth Affairs. (1994). *15-25: A youth statistical profile*. Wellington: Author.

When the book is a collection of articles edited by one or more authors:

Jackson, R., & Buckland, T. (Eds). (1992). *Summer schools: A unique grouping*. London: Oxford University Press.

8.2 Periodicals

Journal articles require volume number, issue number and page numbers after the title of the journal.

Journal article with one author:

Ferguson, I. S. (1973). Forecasting the future for timber. *The Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 18 (2), 562-578.

Journal article with an author but no volume or issue number:

Becht, R. (2003). A Bourne winner. *Player*, pp. 14-21.

Journal articles with no author named:

Anorexia nervosa. (1969). *British Medical Journal*, 1, 529 – 530.

Magazine article:

Nippert M. (2004, December 4). Global meltdown: The coming climate catastrophe. *New Zealand Listener*, p. 12.

Newspaper article with one author:

Jaquiery, A (2004, November 5). A brand new competitive edge *The Dominion Post*, p. C4.

Newspaper articles which do not have a named writer are listed by headline:

Mall owners clash in Supreme Court. (2004, December 7). *The Dominion Post*, p. C 3.

8.3 Internet sources

Document on a website with an author and date:

Beckleheimer, J. (1994). *How do you cite URL's in a bibliography?* Retrieved December 13, 2007, from <http://www.nrlssc.navy.mil/meta/bibliography.html>

When no author is given, the title of the article is listed:

Educating America for the 21st century: Developing a strategic plan for educational leadership for Columbia University-1993-2000. (1994). Retrieved May 16, 2007, from <http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/CONF/EdPlan.html>

When no publication date is shown for the www page:

Prizker, T. J. (n. d.). *An early fragment from central Nepal.* Retrieved December 12, 2007, from <http://www.ingress.com/~astanart/pritker/pritzker.html>

When the information is taken from a home page:

Curtin University of Technology Homepage. (1999). Retrieved February 11, 2008, from <http://www.curtin.edu.au/>

8.4 Database articles

Online journal article, with author, from a specific database (including Proquest, Gale or Ebsco)

8.5 Personal communications

Personal communications can be letters, memos, telephone conversations, email, interviews etc. Because they do not provide recoverable data, personal communications are not included in the reference list. Cite personal communications in the text of your assignment only. Give the initials as well as the last name of the communicator and provide as exact a date as possible including day and month.

“Never drop your mouse or allow it to hang by its tail.” (D Jones, personal communication, March 21, 2007).

D Jones (personal communication, March 21, 2007) advised us never to drop the mouse or hang it by its tail.

For more detailed information on APA referencing access the **Guide to APA Referencing** on the Whitireia library site.

The library staff and your tutors are also able to help you with referencing problems.

The material in this section of the guide has been adapted from:

Chase, P., et al (1998). *Effective business communication*. Auckland: Addison Wesley Longman.

Curtin University of Technology. (2002). *APA referencing*. Library & Information Service. Pamphlet no 33.

School of Nursing and Health Studies. (2002). *Guide to APA referencing*. Porirua: Whitireia Community Polytechnic.

9 Bibliography

A list of references consulted by you while doing your research should appear in the Bibliography. It should include all sources you have read but have not cited or quoted in the final report. A bibliography helps to show the readers how widely you have researched the subject and gives authority to the findings of the report.

10 Glossary

Depending on your topic, a Glossary is an optional section. It contains an alphabetical list of any technical terms used and a brief explanation of their meanings.

11 Appendices

In some reports you need to incorporate supporting information, eg: background material, interview notes, large tables or flowcharts.

Use letters for the Appendix even if your report uses the decimal system, (ie Appendix A, Appendix B etc) and give each one a title.

The Structure of Systems Proposals

The following are the main sections of a systems proposal. The decimal numbering of the sections should start with the Executive Summary.

- Cover Letter
- Title page of project
- Table of Contents
- 1 Executive Summary (including recommendations)
- 2 Outline of Systems Study with Appropriate Documentation
- 3 Detailed Results of the Systems Study
- 4 Systems Alternatives (three or four possible solutions)
- 5 Systems Analysts' Recommendations
- 6 Proposal Summary
- 7 Appendices (assorted documentation, summary of phases, correspondence, and references, and so on)

An explanation of the function of each section is given here.

Cover Letter

This should be concise and friendly in tone and is a courtesy to the management and IT group for whom your work has been carried out.

The letter should state:

- the objectives of the study
- the names of people in your team involved
- the time and place you have arranged for your oral presentation of the systems proposal.

Although attached to the front of your work, it is written last.

Title Page

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

As for reports

Outline of Systems Study

The Outline is similar to a Procedure in a long report. It explains all the methods used in the study, and who or what was studied. Details of any interviews, questionnaires, or research into company records should be discussed in this section.

It should be specific, stating not just 'interviews' but how many interviews you conducted and with whom. Use the passive voice, eg: Interviews were conducted with ...Questionnaires were handed to 25 employees whose work could be affected by the proposal....

Detailed Results of Systems Study

This section should present in a logical order what you have found out, through the methods described above. It cannot contain any information which has not been discovered by an approved method. There is no place here for unsubstantiated anecdotal evidence or your own hunches.

What the section should show is where problems exist in the current system. These may include how work is handled by the current system, error rates, or how current or projected work volume will impact on the system

In this section you are identifying the problems which you will deal with in the next section.

Systems Alternatives

By producing several alternative solutions to the problem you are demonstrating to the company that you have thought carefully about the project.

You should deal with each alternative separately, explaining the costs and benefits of what you are proposing. Do not be afraid to include disadvantages as well as advantages because this shows you are aware of possible problems.

Each alternative should include recommendations which are actionable. Each recommendation should state what the management needs to do to put this alternative into place. The wording should be clear: 'Purchase packaged software to manage the inventory'. 'Supply laptop computers to all team leaders.'

You should always include an alternative which recommends the status quo. The company may not be able to change to more expensive and creative systems at this point.

Systems Analyst's Recommendations

By the time you have discussed all the alternatives, including making no change at all, you will have formed an opinion about which is the most practical for this company.

This section gives one recommended solution chosen from the alternatives. Your suggestion should flow logically from the discussion in the previous section and you must include reasons why you have chosen this particular course of action. Your reasons should be based on the evidence and sound judgement.

Proposal Summary

This is a final very brief summary which repeats the objectives of the study and the recommended solution. Its purpose is to allow you to stress the importance and feasibility of what you are recommending. It should be a very positive, up-beat paragraph.

Appendices

As with a long report, the Appendices are where you place additional information which you may have referred to but not presented in detail elsewhere. It can include correspondence, or detailed graphs in addition to any already used.

The material in this section of the guide has been adapted from:

Kendall K. E., & Kendall J. E. (2002). *Systems analysis and design*, (5th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall International Inc,

The Structure of Essays

Essays usually are in one of two forms:

Descriptive Essay

or

Discussion Essay.

The title of a descriptive essay usually asks you to:
describe, record, illustrate, explain, summarise....

If words similar to these are used, you are being asked to read and research the topic given and write about it in your own words.

The title of a discussion essay usually asks you to:
evaluate, assess, comment on, discuss, compare and contrast ...

If words similar to these are used you are being asked to read and research the topic and present differing views from different authors. You have to examine and analyse different opinions or sets of data before making your own conclusion. In your writing you have to show how your conclusion is backed up by some of the authors of the books or articles.

The four Sections of an Essay are:

Introduction
Body
Conclusions
References

You do not number these sections and you should check whether headings are appropriate within the body of the essay.

Introduction

The purpose of the introduction to any piece of writing is to attract the reader's attention and make them want to read the whole article.

The introduction to an essay explains briefly what the topic is about. Your analysis of the question will help with this. It goes on to give any relevant background to the topic and set it in a context.

The introduction is also where you explain how your essay is structured. For instance if it is a discussion essay you explain how you have presented the facts to give two differing points of view before drawing your own conclusions.

Body

In a descriptive essay the body elaborates on the key points of the topic you have been asked to describe or explain. It should flow logically from one key point to another. It may be a series of paragraphs or it may be divided into sections.

In a discussion essay, you will have at least two sections, presenting facts to support contrasting arguments. Groups of facts which support the same side of an argument or question should be grouped together.

Sub-headings may help to clarify your structure and arguments, but check whether they are appropriate.

All material quoted from your secondary sources should be properly cited as shown under Step Five of the writing process.

Conclusions

This is an important section because it shows the reader how well you understand the material you are writing about. It is where ideas are drawn together to emphasise the points you have made

In a descriptive essay what you select for your Conclusions demonstrates your ability to judge the material and select intelligently.

In a discussion essay, the Conclusions give you the opportunity to express your own opinion, based on the evidence you have presented in the body. Again it shows how well you can select from a range of ideas and make your own judgement.

References

A full reference for all sources cited in your text must be included. The style for this is shown above under the References section of the Long Report.

Bibliography

Chase, P., et al (1998). *Effective business communication*. Auckland: Addison Wesley Longman.

Curtin University of Technology. (2002). *APA Referencing*. Library & Information Service. Pamphlet no 33.

Dwyer J. (1993). *The Business Communication Handbook*. (3rd ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Kendall K. E., & Kendall J. E. (2002). *Systems analysis and design*, (5th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall International.

. (2002). *Guide to APA referencing*. Porirua: Whitireia Community Polytechnic.

