

Writing Effective Research Reports

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Our aims

This course is designed to equip participants with essential skills and knowledge to write high quality research reports. We will cover:

- What makes a good research report?
- Writing with your audience in mind
- Planning a report: structure, content and format
- Features that encourage clarity and ease of use



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FACC - a research report maxim

Focused – on important information

Accurate – does not mislead

Clear – does not confuse

Concise – doesn't waste readers' time



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IMRaD - a research report default structure

Introduction
Method
Results and
Discussion



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Elevator pitch/Thesis Statement/Abstract

Finished last, conceived first?

What is/was the study about?

What question is/was it designed to answer?

What type (method) of study is/was it?

What type of people/data are/were involved (e.g. scale)?

What are/were the most important findings?



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Research reports – some views 1

Use client's formatting protocol

'I' and 'we' are fine

The ideal number of acronyms is zero

Care with terms that have a colloquial meaning (e.g. liberal)

Care with terms/labels that convey an elevated status to data

Explain new terms

If introducing ideas, don't suggest they are established e.g. say *In this report we'll use the term ABC to mean XYZ*

Don't use the same term to mean two different things

Don't call the same thing by different terms



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Research reports – some views 2

- Explain and be consistent with abbreviations
- Don't assume familiarity, e.g. *say UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson*
- Distinguish verbatim comments (e.g. italics/indent/speech marks..)
- Identify verbatim comments within bounds of confidentiality
- Avoid percentages when using in small samples
- Write numbers up to ten in words
- The ideal number of decimal places is zero
- Be consistent on number formatting throughout
- Include sample size/base with graphs, charts, tables, %
- Care with plagiarism – reference and acknowledge credit where due



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Active better than passive

1. The riot was stopped by the police
2. The factory was closed by the Safety Inspector
3. The implementation of the policy was done by the team
4. The matter will be considered shortly



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Communication and 'audience'



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Gospel according to Ronia

Ronia Hinds is a presentation coach. She works at a senior level in large organisations helping teams make effective presentations when there is a lot at stake.

The 'Communications Quiz' is based on Ronia's belief and experience of good practice.



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Gospel according to Barbara

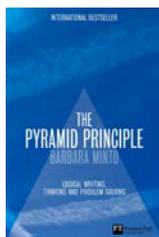
"When I first started working for Accenture, I managed to have lunch with one of the most successful partners in the practice. Over dinner I asked him all sorts of questions, one of which was 'What book would you recommend I read to move on ahead of my peers?' The partner thought for a moment and then said 'The Pyramid Principle by Barbara Minto'.

I got it and did indeed move ahead" JB 5 Sept



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Gospel according to Barbara



Barbara Minto by Hazel Reeves (work in progress) © Hazel Reeves, 2011



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The pyramid principle of the title refers to her belief that a pyramid structure is the correct and perhaps only way to present information persuasively. She argues:

Controlling the sequence in which you present your ideas is the single most important act necessary to clear writing.

http://www.badlanguage.net/pyramid_principle (Matthew Stibbe)



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Lauren's letter



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Dear Siobhan,

Remember last Saturday when I was in town with my boyfriend and we bumped into you when we were looking in the window at H&M. He told me that you kissed him when my back was turned? I hate you and I don't want to be your friend any more.

The other day, when you turned up at mine and my mum made us that tuna salad and you said 'Yuk, that's the worst salad I've ever tasted.' And another thing, when my cat brushed against your new jeans, you kicked him and said you would set your dog on him?

Lauren



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In the course of a morning, four people came into the car showroom.

For the first visitor of the morning, this represented the third visit to the showroom within the past month. Today the prospective customer came in to check about the service back-up the dealership provided for the new car they were thinking of buying. The salesperson sensed the visitor wasn't yet ready to talk about trade-in deals on the old car although, on the last visit, the prospective customer did ask what the dealership did with the cars that were traded in.

The bulk of the morning was spent with the second visitor. This person stayed for two hours and asked lots of questions of the specification of a certain model. This involved the salesperson making two phone calls to the manufacturer's Technical Department to get hold of information which the salesperson had never been asked for before. The salesperson felt that, after the two hours, they were moving close to agreeing a sale – but weren't to that point yet.

The third visitor came in and, after a short while in the showroom, seemed eager to test drive one of the new models on display. The salesperson handed the prospective customer the keys so they could try the car out for themselves. Twenty minutes later driver and car returned and a sale agreed.

The fourth visitor came in just before lunch time and also seemed interested in one of the display models. A test drive was agreed and the salesperson and potential customer went out in the car. On the test drive they stopped off for a quick bite to eat and continued the conversation in a local café. The person decided to buy the car and the salesperson agreed to deliver it to the customer's home one evening next week.

A good morning's work?



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How each style makes decisions

FACILITATING

- Reluctantly
- Idealistically in terms of people
- Prefers to be part of a group decision
- Concerned about effect on other people

PROMOTING

- Boldly
- Prefers new alternatives
- Involves others
- Quickly

ANALYTICAL

- Reluctantly
- Logically
- Slowly
- Likes to study alternative possibilities in detail
- Carefully

CONTROLLING

- Realistically
- Willing to take calculated risk
- Independently
- Prefers effective alternatives



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Audiences

Your feet in their shoes

- What does your audience need/want or value?
- What do you want your audience to think, learn, or assume about you?
- What impression do you want your research to convey?
- How much attention will they reasonably grant you?
- What form/medium is most relevant to them?
- What role does visualisation have?



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Back to the document (IMRaD)



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Introduction

Three key ingredients

- ✓ **Background/context** (as little as possible)
- ✓ **Research focus**
- ✓ **Research questions/lines of enquiry**



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Introduction – how much do you want to ‘sell it’?

Three steps

1. **Situation** (an uncontested statement)
2. **Complication** (a challenge or consequence)
3. **Solution** (your work leads to a way forward)



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Method

Two key ingredients

- ✓ **Logic of research design**
- ✓ **Top down key details**



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Results

Four key considerations

- ✓ **Logic structure** (question order, importance)
- ✓ **Data, not interpretation**
- ✓ **Top down**
- ✓ **Lead sections with a table/graph**



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Tables

	Communication	Reference
Role/purpose	Communicate results	Document results
Where	Results section (body)	Appendix
Size	As small as possible	Large enough for reference
Detail	Just enough for comparison (low)	As necessary



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Discussion

Six key considerations

- ✓ **Return to research questions**
- ✓ **Explanation/implications of results**
- ✓ **Links with other studies**
- ✓ **Limitations of the study**
- ✓ **Avenues for further research**
- ✓ (conclude with) **Importance on this research**



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Discussion / Recommendations

How far to go?

- ✓ **Substantiated by the data**
- ✓ **Major ones first**
- ✓ **Careful language** (neither salvation nor shock)
- ✓ **'stick'/'carrot'** (your choice)



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Not forgetting...



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Gunning fog index

- Select a passage of sentences of around 100 words (such as one or more full paragraphs) Determine the average sentence length. (Divide the number of words by the number of sentences.)
- Count the "complex" words consisting of three or more syllables. Do not include proper nouns, familiar jargon, or compound words. Do not include common suffixes (such as -es, -ed, or -ing) as a syllable. Calculate the % of complex words within total words
- Add the average sentence length and the percentage of complex words; and multiply the result by 0.4.

fog index = 0.4 (av. sentence length + % complex words)



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- Clear title
- Section headings, sub-headings, sub-sub headings
- Number pages
- Number paragraphs?
- Contents page if over 5 pages of doc
- Lists of Figures and of Tables
- Titles/numbers on Figures and Tables
- De-clutter (footnote/append)
- Author(s), date, contact details
- Acknowledgements
- External sources referenced (recognised protocol)
- Abbreviations introduced/glossary
- Executive Summary first, written last.



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FACC - you be the judge?

- Slow cooking, 'sleep on it'
- 'Four eyes'/Grammarly
- Read it aloud (syntax, flow)
- Repetition avoided (search/thesaurus)
- Filler words/phrases removed (e.g. *that, and*)
- Visually attractive (Fiverr)



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Thank you

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