

## Writing an Executive Summary

An **executive summary** is usually required for Business, Engineering and Science reports or proposals. In academic reports it is often referred to as an **abstract** and may be shorter in length. It is a fully developed mini-version or overview of the report so it is not merely an introduction.

### An Executive Summary aims to:

- provide a brief overview of the whole report so that executives or managers could read the executive summary alone without the accompanying report.
- allow the reader to quickly understand the information contained in the report
- persuade the reader that the document is worthy of being read.
- provide concise, complete, specific and self-sufficient information that can be understood in isolation.

### How to write an Executive Summary

- Write the executive summary in your own words, using a formal writing style. Avoid using jargon.
- State the *purpose/aim* of the report. For example, the main purpose of this report is to.....
- Describe the *procedure* that you used. The methodology or analytical process used to process the data collected.
- Provide the *results* of the study. The major findings may include a number of sentences.
- The *recommendations* (if applicable) should also be provided.
- Edit the summary to remove minor points; judgement is required to ensure that the summary is concise.
- Remove unnecessary words and sentences. Check accuracy of grammar, spelling, sentence and paragraph structures.
- Use formatting and graphics to highlight the message. Clarity of the summary can be improved through usage of bullet points and subtitles in the organisational structure. This will also make it easier for the reader to skim read.

## Process involved in writing an Executive Summary

- The executive summary is normally not more than a page in length and should provide an adequate representation of the entire document in a shortened form.
- The executive summary is provided on a separate page at the beginning of the report before the Table of Contents.
- An impersonal writing style is used so as to ensure that the report remains formal especially if the audience is your manager or supervisor.
- At least one sentence is provided for each main section of the report
- The key points in the executive summary should be presented in the identical order as they appear in the report so as to encourage logical flow and cohesion.
- It may be useful to write the executive summary after you have written the whole report so that it more accurately reflects the content of the report.
- Avoid recycling sentences or paragraphs from the body of the report as this can be repetitious for the reader.
- Please check with your lecturer or tutor concerning the word length. Generally, the executive summary can be approximately 10% of the total word length.

Remember to look at 'Report Writing' and 'Writing in the Third Person' for more information about making strategic and useful notes.

### Further Reading

- Bovee, C.L., & Thill, J.V.(2005). *Business Communication Today*. (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Kuiper, Shirley. (2007). *Contemporary Business Report Writing*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). USA: Thomson South-western.

### External Links

- University of Canberra, Academic Skills Centre (2010). , Report Writing  
<http://www.canberra.edu.au.studyskills/writing/reports/>
- Central Queensland University, (2010). The abstract/synopsis/executive summary.  
[http://www.dtls.cqu.edu.au/clc/2\\_1\\_4.html](http://www.dtls.cqu.edu.au/clc/2_1_4.html)
- The University of Queensland  
<http://www.uq.edu.au/student-services/phdwriting/phlink08.html>

### Additional learning tools / Sources of information

- See [www.griffith.edu.au/library/workshops-training/self-help-resources](http://www.griffith.edu.au/library/workshops-training/self-help-resources) for further resources to complement this information sheet.