

Writing in business/academic situations

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Writing for business/academics is very different from writing fiction.

The purpose of any document you produce is to *inform* the reader about an issue.

The twin goals:

- ▶ give as much information as possible
- ▶ and as little as necessary.

You are writing for different readers

Keep this in mind: Different readers - different needs

Some

- ▶ Just want to find out what this document is about
- ▶ Just want a quick answer to a question.
- ▶ ...
- ▶ want to understand fully what you write, in order to build upon it in their work, or possibly to replicate your results.

Standard features

Most business / academic writing has the following:

- ▶ An executive summary / abstract that summarizes the issue and the results.
- ▶ An introduction that gives us the question to be answered, and summarizes what is coming, as well as a quick overview of the results
- ▶ Summary Tables/figures with lots of details in small fonts. These details should be enough to understand the table/figure without reading the text.
- ▶ Appendices with full details.

An **Appendix** contains *self-contained* discussions of *supplementary* results. Appendix presentation of results is for looking up details for the specially interested, it should not contain results *necessary* to understand the discussion in the text.

Structure

Depend on the question to be answered.

Writing

The main challenges

- ▶ Maintain a flow in the presentation.
- ▶ Keep it short.

Iteration/Rewriting

Do not be afraid of rewriting and changing

Checkpoints

- ▶ Executive summary/abstract, max one page, summarizing the whole paper, *including* the results
- ▶ What is the question? – Start by telling the reader the question to be answered, with enough context to understand what is being asked
- ▶ Keep it to the point: Only material relevant for answering the question to be included.
- ▶ Keep it short. It is better to give only highpoints of results/data/calculations in the text. Strive for a *few* summary tables with the relevant information. Give *full* details in appendices.
- ▶ Explain figures/tables. Any table or figure should include (in very small font) enough information to understand what is being presented without the need for wading through the whole text. Do *never* just throw numbers at the reader without some explanation.
- ▶ Conclude: Reiterate what were the major results/findings

Presentations

When attending a meeting, or giving a presentation, at some point the discussion becomes so specific that it is necessary to share with the audience your input through overheads/slides.

You should therefore prepare/bring with you slides, even “just in case”

On slidesmanship.

- ▶ Slides should *summarize* what you say, not *repeat* it.
- ▶ Limit the text on each slide. Use bullet points and short sentences.
- ▶ Figures are the preferred way of summarizing.
- ▶ If you need a table, keep it to the bare essentials (not the whole spreadsheet).

For students in case situations, in addition:

- ▶ Prepared slides force you to structure your thoughts.
- ▶ The first slide should be about the key issues.
- ▶ Detailed calculations on slides that you only show if necessary.