What is a report?

A report is a document that defines a subject or problem, and gathers relevant information and facts in order to present them as completely and accurately as possible.

The clarity and readability of any report are greatly enhanced by attention to matters of document structure and presentation style as well as content.

Document structure relates to the organisation of the information, e.g., use of a title page, headings and subheadings, page numbering, etc.

Presentation style relates to such things as:

- Design of a title page
- Format of headings and subheadings
- Use of space around key features/paragraphs.
- Use of underlining and italics.
- Font style and size in different sections of document.
- Overall ‘look’ and layout, consistency of style.

The following pages provide you with guidelines on document structure and style elements. This document should be used as a general guide when preparing material for submission in your course.

However, you should also refer to any specific guidelines and instructions given to you by individual teachers.

Document Structure

The report document should have a structure that clearly identifies the information contained in it.

Title page
Formal reports should have a title page. It is important to identify the content of the report by clearly stating the title of the document, as well as identify the author of the report and the intended audience.

Headings and sub-headings
The body of a report should be broken up into paragraphs, and where applicable, headings and subheadings should be used to make all information easy to locate and read.

Header / footer
Use the header / footer to provide information such as page numbering, and author’s name.
Presentation Style Guide

Overview

As a general rule:

- keep your style consistent
- use it to help present the information clearly and effectively
- use only a few variations of font and size (see each section for specific information)
- use space wisely

Font and size in different sections of document.

This is a much-abused area. Please follow these guidelines.

- use no more than 2 different fonts overall
- only one font should be used for the body text. Choose one of the following ‘serif’ fonts: Times New Roman or Book Antiqua
- the body text should be in 12 point (the most commonly used size).
- avoid ‘sans serif’ fonts (such as Arial) in the body text as these are considered harder to read.
- do not vary font size within the text of a document, except for headings. Use spacing or bold if you want emphasis.
- headings and subheadings may be in the same font as the body text, or you may choose a different font for headings and subheadings. This may be other serif font you have not used for the body text (either Times New Roman or Book Antiqua,) or you may choose a ‘sans serif’ font. Please select either Arial or Tahoma.

Overall ‘look’ and layout of a report document.

This type of document is usually of a conservative nature, and maximum clarity is the aim.

- never use unnecessary dividing lines, borders, shading etc. within the text of the document.
- never use ‘smiley’ faces or any other sort of ‘Wingding’ font.
- never have a heading or subheading separate from the text it refers to, or split a short sentence or paragraph over two pages if you can possibly avoid it. In other words use ‘Page Break’ intelligently.
- treat your report as a piece of design. Ask your yourself the following questions when you think you have finished:
  - does the layout of the document serve the intent of clarity of understanding, or does any aspect actually hinder this process.
  - does the document ‘look’ attractive, does it have any messy elements. Identify them and fix them.
  - use the Spell check option in WORD to assist you check for errors. Remember to use this intelligently. Check each possible error carefully, do not just change it - it may not be right!
Individual Areas of the Document

1. **Title page**
Create a separate page at the beginning of the document. The title page should:

a) Promote a sense of the importance of the document. To achieve this:
   - Plan overall layout first to give maximum impact, including spacing to balance the different elements across the length and breadth of the page
   - Use a border
   - Use larger size font (16-20 point)

b) Make clear the institution responsible for the report, if such is the case.
   - Place institution name at head of title page (if applicable)
   - Use borders and shading.
   - Use block capitals for institution name.
   - Use a font size 16-20 (or whatever is appropriate to make a sufficient impact in terms of amount of text).
   - Use bold text.

c) Give clear prominence to the title by:
   - Differentiate between main title and sub title (if appropriate) by use of upper and lower case.
   - Consider use of centring
   - Use font size 16-20 (or whatever is appropriate to make a sufficient impact in terms of amount of text).
   - Use bold text.
   - Place sufficient space between institution name and title to give appropriate sense of balance to the page.

d) Make clear who report is for, and whom it is by:
   - Place “Prepared by:”; “prepared For:” and “Date:” headings to left of page.
   - Do not use block capitals.
   - Use font size 16-20 (or whatever lower point size is appropriate in relation to main headings/titles).
2. **Body of Report**

Choose either Times New Roman or Book Antiqua, 12 point.

2.1 **Headings and subheadings in text of report.**

a) Main headings should:
   - Align to the left above the text they announce.
   - Be in block capitals
   - Be in bold.
   - Be font size 14.

b) Subheadings should:
   - Align to the left above the text they announce.
   - Not be block capitals
   - Be in bold.

2.2 **Use of space around key features/paragraphs.**

   - Give separate paragraphs (or even sentences) prominence, especially if they have their own subheading.
   - Make sure that any individual paragraph is not too long in the overall context of the report.
   - Use `Format_paragraph` Spacing: “6 point after” to separate every paragraph

2.3 **Use of underlining and italics.**

Generally speaking keep these to a minimum (if used at all). Use them only:

   - To differentiate headings and sub headings (as above).
   - To indicate bibliographic information within certain information such as titles.

3. **Header / Footer**

   - Add a header using the same font and size as used in the body text containing your name
   - Add a footer using the same font and size as used in the body text containing:
     - the file name aligned left
     - Page numbering in the style X of Y