

Quick Guide: Preparing to write a report

Preparation is key when writing a report. Time spent at this stage will mean that your report is more focussed, it will be written with the reader in mind and it will be structured into a logical order avoiding repetition. By preparing more thoroughly you will also be able to write your reports more quickly and do fewer drafts – if you prepare really well you may only have to write it once. So here are the top ten tips to help with preparation.

1. **Ask yourself “Why am I writing this report?”** This will give you the purpose of your report and tell you what you are aiming to achieve. Keep this in mind whilst planning.
2. **Ask yourself “Who am I writing to?”** Consider the reader or readers; their knowledge and level of expertise; their needs and expectations; what they are like; how they want the report presented; what their reaction is likely to be to your report; and who else may read it.
3. **Ask yourself “What is the content?”** So what shall I include/exclude? What will achieve my purpose? What will achieve their objectives? What is suitable for the reader? How much content shall I include? What extra content do I need – appendices? What style shall I use (formal/chatty)? What's appropriate for this reader? What recommendations shall I make?
4. **Ask yourself “How will I structure the report?”** What order will I write in? How will I make it interesting and appropriate for this reader?
5. **Ask yourself “When will I write the report?”** When is the report needed by? When shall I plan, write and check? When do I need a response from the reader?
6. **Ask yourself “Where will I write the report?”** Where is the document going? Where will they read it?
7. **Collate all the information.** Decide what to include based on the purpose of the report and the reader.
8. **Plan and organise the content** either by writing notes, brainstorming or mind mapping. Decide the order based on the purpose and the reader.
9. **Know what the ending is going to be.** Know the conclusions and recommendations.
10. Now you can begin writing!

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