

Quick Guide: Writing a Report

Last month we looked at preparing to write a report. Now you are ready to write! To write well, use plain English and adopt the ABC of writing: be accurate, be brief and be clear. Here are the **top ten tips** for writing a report:

1. **Be accurate** by checking the spelling, grammar and punctuation. Also check all your facts and figures.
2. **Aim for an average sentence length** of 15 – 20 words. Use 10 words for impact.
3. **Use shorter, more familiar words.** So use "try" instead of "endeavour"; "help" instead of "assistance". And avoid jargon that can confuse the reader.
4. **Use single words instead of phrases.** So use "can" instead of "has the capability of"; "now" instead of "at this moment in time".
5. **Avoid overuse** of adjectives, adverbs, tautologies, clichés and nominalisations.

So avoid the following:	Instead use:
a round circle	circle
absolutely full	full
with regard to	about
I have carried out the preparation of your accounts.	I have prepared your accounts.

6. **Use the active voice** whenever possible. For example, "John made the investment", not "the investment was made by John". Using the active voice makes your writing more direct and easier to read as it uses fewer words.
7. **Avoid using "smothered" verbs.** So use "meet" instead of "hold a meeting"; "decide" instead of "make a decision"; "agree" instead of "reach an agreement".
8. **Break up long chunks of text** by using:
 - * paragraphs for sections of information
 - * headings and sub-headings
 - * diagrams, charts, graphs and tables
 - * lists and bullet points
9. **Make sure that your conclusions** and recommendations are supported by evidence in the main body of the report.
10. **Check you have a clear introduction**, that the order is logical and that there is a clear ending.

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