

PROCESS - Robust Report Writing

12 Steps to Building Your Report

This metaphor comparing the steps of building of a house with the writing of a highly effective report, I have found helpful in my classrooms. I am happy to share it with you here as a mental shortcut to arranging your words, phrases and paragraphs to create a place your readers will comfortably inhabit.

PLANNING

1. Interview with homeowner –
 - a. know your audience
 - b. know who you're writing the report for e.g. your partner
2. Draw architectural blueprints –
 - a. brainstorming, plans, designs
3. Collect your tools and resources
 - a. Get Grammarly
 - b. Read good samples from your collection
 - c. Look at your Cheat Sheet for your common structural challenges
 - d. Look at the common language of good reports from your collection

THE BUILD

4. Lay the foundation – context and introduction
5. Build the frame – structure
 - a. Is there a templated structure?
 - b. What structures have been used for similar documents?
 - c. What would be a rough outline of a structure?
6. Install the plumbing –
 - a. important components
 - b. insert relevant data and finding
7. Raise the walls –
 - a. build out the content
 - b. make correlations
8. Sealing the holes – FIRST EDIT
 - a. Refine correlations
 - b. Refine the data to be more meaningful
 - c. Add linking words to take your audience from one idea to another
 - d. Check logical development
9. Placing the roof – SECOND EDIT
 - a. make your arguments water tight and solid
 - b. Is there good organisation and flow – does one idea easily lead from one to the next – are you taking your reader by the hand from beginning to end
10. Drying phase – let everything sit overnight to see it tomorrow with fresh eyes

THE FITOUT

11. Move in your furniture – THIRD EDIT
 - a. Are you safe?
 - b. Have I provided everything for my audience to be comfortable with my arguments, facts, data, analyses, findings, conclusions?
 - c. Re-read good samples to see if they have anything you don't have
12. Building rating report – FOURTH EDIT
 - a. get feedback from a peer and consider their review notes

What is a report?

1. A methodological approach
2. You take (and outline) a scenario (problem, objective, field of operations, illness, story);
3. Sometimes you propose a hypothesis about that matter and set out to test it, but in any event, you look very hard, rigorously and objectively at the matter;
4. You apply, specifically, a method of analysis to the problem or scenario (you gather relevant data, you measure it, you conduct all manner of relevant research in order to test your hypothesis);
5. You make some findings (what you discover when you apply those tests and measures);
6. You interpret those findings logically and draw conclusions;
7. You make recommendations or draw out the implications to point the way ahead.
8. Your report documents your approach – a model drawn from science but applied well beyond it.

Typical Report Document Structure

Reports can take on a wide range of structures, but they typically include the following in one way or another.

1. Executive summary – encapsulates the whole report; allows a reader to get the whole report at a gulp, without needing to read it: thesis or conclusion; reasons; implications; summary of findings and recommendations.
2. Introduction – summarises the issue or problem, its background and context, why it matters, why you're looking into it and the scope of the inquiry.
3. Approach (perhaps part of the introduction) – explains your methodology, models, ways of sorting data. How you worked.
4. Findings (this will make up the bulk of your report, and you can organise it in many different ways) – lists the critical things you found when you applied your approach to the facts at hand. In this section you distil the critical facts you discovered, and you say what they mean – you draw conclusions about them, pointing out the implications of the findings for the problem you were investigating and the context in which you looked. You anticipate the solutions you'll articulate next.
5. Recommendations – sets down the steps you propose to deal with the diagnosis you make in your findings. This is a report, so these are not, and should not be articulated as, your personal opinions.
6. Conclusions – wraps it all up and suggests what will happen next.

Sentence Structure

1. The Head-On Sentence – the most important subject + verb => the rest
2. A short, simple sentence – placed after a longer one will be impactful
3. A longer, complex or compound sentence – use subordinate clauses sparingly
4. Conjunctions – use FANBOY – for, and, nor, but, or, yet to join sentences
5. Linking words and phrases – to guide your reader