

Business Research Methodology

Chapter- Report Writing (M. Com - IV Semester)

**Prof. Arvind Kumar
Dept. of Commerce
University of Lucknow**

What is Report?

In every research, after collecting and analysing the data, the researcher has to accomplish the task of drawing inferences followed by report writing. A report is a clearly structured document in which the writer identifies and examines issues, events, or findings of an investigation. Information obtained from research or from undertaking a project is delivered in a precise, concise writing style organised under a set of headings and sub-headings, which enable the reader to find data quickly. Graphs and tables can also be used to present data in the body of the report. Rather than commenting upon, comparing or evaluating ideas, as an essay does, a report frequently offers recommendations for action based on the information it has presented.

In other words, A report is a written presentation of factual information based on an investigation or research. Reports form the basis for solving problems or making decisions, often in the subjects of business and the sciences. In simple terms, a report is an interpretation of findings through which the factors that seem to explain what has been observed by researcher in the course of the study can be better understood and it also provides a theoretical conception which can serve as a guide for further researches.

Characteristics of an Ideal Report

An ideal report must have following characteristics-

- An ideal report should be Clear, concise, accurate and well organised with clear section headings.
- Easy for the audience to understand.
- Presentation is a key element in successful report writing. Formatting, revising and proof reading are important process for good report writing.
- All reports should have an executive summary that presents the essential elements of the report from the introduction through to the recommendations and outcomes.
- Reports should be visually appealing and easy to read. Diagrams, figures, charts, tables and graphs can all add interest to a report.

Purpose of Report Writing

Research report is an indispensable task of every research work in which findings of a research make known to others. Needs or purposes of research report can be outlined as follow:

- To provide the information regarding the findings of research work i.e. methods, data analysis, conclusion and so on in the systematic, scientific and accepted way.
- To elicit crucial facts for solution derived and decision making.
- To prove the worth and legitimacy of assigned research job.
- To provide the judgement tools for the judgement of quality and talent of researcher within and outside the academia.

- To communicate the research findings professionally.
- To pertain the credibility of the research.
- To develop appreciation of standards, consolidate arguments and identify the knowledge gaps.

Significance of Report Writing

Major significance of report writing are as follows-

- Research task remains incomplete till the report has been presented and/or written.
- It is a communication of research result.
- It provides a framework for the work that can be conducted in the same or related areas.
- It provides the necessary guidance for taking appropriate actions
- Authenticates the quality of the work carried out.
- Establishes the strength of the findings obtained.

Procedure of Research Report Writing

Researchers can prepare report at their ease as there are no such set rules or procedure of writing reports. However, following general guidelines can help for writing research reports:

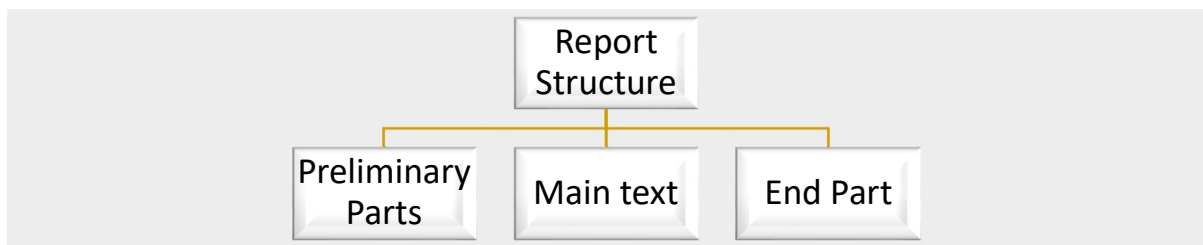
- 1. Revising expectation:** Before starting report writing, researcher should revisit the purpose of research and expectation from the researcher. If the researcher is intended to submit academic reports, minimum steps and format are well designed. Hence, researcher should identify the answer of some questions as what is the objective of research? Is there any format of reports? Is there word limit? Who will read the report? What is the process of report evaluation? etc. Answers of such questions help to make a good report.
- 2. Preparing outline:** On the basis of nature of data, objective of research, and requirement of the evaluating agency, researcher need to prepare outline i.e. roadmap to the research report. This helps to decide in how many chapters, in how many topics, whether descriptive or analytical report is required to prepare. In simple words, outline helps to arrange the idea before starting write up. It is the planning phase for the content of report for making it more effective. During this phase, researcher should also plan the time frame within which a report is to be completed and submitted.
- 3. Arranging data:** On the basis of objectives, population and sample for the research, researcher collects the data from different sources. Different types of data are collected for the purpose. Such different data from different sources need to be processed and tabulated. Only relevant data are sequentially arranged so that right information will be obtained at the right time for the right purpose. For this different tables of data need to be prepared and named properly.
- 4. Start writing:** Now, researcher should start writing the report. Report should start with introduction and proceed with the content and topic arranged on the outline. Each topic or section consists of specific feature and way of writing. Thus, instead writing haphazardly, researcher should follow the sections.
- 5. Preparing the first draft:** The report completed with a single effort may not be excellent. Thus, researcher should update and upgrade the report with series of revisions. For this purpose, the first draft is to be prepared and revisit the whole draft

carefully. Add or remove the necessary descriptions, interpretations, and analysis as and when required.

- 6. Review and rewrite:** Every report consists of scope of some improvement. It is true that in each reading, you can find something to rewrite or rearrange. This makes the report more interesting and excellent. Thus, researcher must read and reread the draft again and again. During this course of action, you need to compare the report with format (if any specific format is required), methodological conformation, values and data revisit as there may be some misprints, if possible, language expert need to be consulted. After rewriting the drafts, the final draft will be prepared which can be submitted to the concern authority.

Report Writing Structure

Reports follow a standardised format. This allows the reader to find the information easily and focus on specific areas. Report can be divided into three major parts-



- 1. Preliminary Parts:** In its preliminary portion the report should carry a title and date, followed by acknowledgements in the form of 'Preface' or 'Foreword'. Then there should be a table of contents followed by list of tables and illustrations so that the decision-maker or anybody interested in reading the report can easily locate the location of required information.
- 2. Main text:** The main text provides the complete outline of the research report along with all details. Title of the research study is repeated at the top of the first page of the main text and then follows the other details on pages numbered consecutively, beginning with the second page. Each main section of the report should begin on a new page. The main text of the report should have the following sections:
 - a. Introduction:** The purpose of introduction is to introduce the research project to the readers. It should contain a clear statement of the objectives of research i.e., enough background should be given to make clear to the reader why the problem was considered worth investigating. A brief summary of other relevant research may also be stated so that the present study can be seen in that context. The hypotheses of study, if any, and the definitions of the major concepts employed in the study should be explicitly stated in the introduction of the report. The methodology adopted in conducting the study must be fully explained. The statistical analysis adopted must also be clearly stated. In addition to all this, the scope of the study should be stated and the boundary lines be demarcated. The various limitations, under which the research project was completed, must also be narrated.
 - b. Statement of findings and recommendations:** After introduction, the research report must contain a statement of findings and recommendations in non-technical

language so that it can be easily understood by all concerned. If the findings happen to be extensive, at this point they should be put in the summarised form.

- c. **Results:** A detailed presentation of the findings of the study, with supporting data in the form of tables and charts together with a validation of results, is the next step in writing the main text of the report. The result section of the report should contain statistical summaries and reductions of the data rather than the raw data. All the results should be presented in logical sequence and splitted into readily identifiable sections.
 - d. **Implications of the results:** Toward the end of the main text, the researcher should again put down the results of his research clearly and precisely. He/she should, state the implications that flow from the results of the study, for the general reader is interested in the implications for understanding the human behaviour.
 - e. **Summary:** It has become customary to conclude the research report with a very brief summary, resting in brief the research problem, the methodology, the major findings and the major conclusions drawn from the research results.
3. **End Matter:** At the end of the report, appendices should be enlisted in respect of all technical data such as questionnaires, sample information, mathematical derivations and the like ones. Bibliography of sources consulted should also be given.

The above discussion may summarise with the same headings in the following table as a ready reference-

S.N.	Section	Purpose
1.	Title Page (Not part of the word count)	Gives the title of the report, the researcher's name/number, the name of the person the report is being submitted to, and the completion date.
2.	Table of Contents (Not part of the word count)	Shows the sections of the report. Gives the headings, subheadings and page numbers.
3.	Abstract or Executive Summary	Gives a summary of the whole report. Outlines the report's purpose, methodology, findings, main conclusions and recommendations. Mainly written in past tense, and prepared last.
4.	Terms of Reference	Briefly states the purpose and scope of the report. This includes who requested the report, the main issues or

		problems to be identified, the reason for undertaking the report and the due date of the report.
5.	Procedure	Outlines the methods used to collect information e.g. interviews, questionnaires, observations and/or research.
6.	Introduction (May be used instead of the Terms of Reference and Procedure)	Outlines the context, background and purpose of the report. Defines terms and sets limits of the investigation. The reader/audience can easily identify what the report is about, how information was gathered, and why the report is needed. Mainly uses past tense and can be written last – but is presented first.
7.	Findings and/or Discussion For this section, avoid using the headings “Findings” or “Discussion”. Instead, create headings and sub-headings that identify the main issues or problems.	Findings: What was found during the research or investigation. Gives the facts only – no interpretation by the writer of the report. Tables, graphs or diagrams can be used. Must be relevant to the issues and problems identified in the Terms of Reference. Arranged in a logical order with headings and sub-headings. Discussion: You may also be required to analyse, interpret and evaluate the findings. The discussion draws together different parts of the findings and may refer to findings of other studies and/or theories.
8.	Conclusions	Brief statements of the key findings of the report (full explanation is given in the Findings and/or Discussion). Arranged so the major

		conclusions come first. Should relate directly to the objectives set out in the Terms of Reference or Introduction. Follow logically from the facts in the Findings and/or Discussion. Must be complete enough for recommendations to be made from them.
9.	Recommendations (note: not all reports give recommendations)	The opinions of the writer of the report about possible changes, or solutions to the problems, including who should take action, what should be done, when and how it should be done.
10.	References (Not part of the word count)	A list of the sources that are used in and referred to in the report. Use APA referencing style.
11.	Bibliography (Not always required)	Lists any sources that were read for the research but were not cited in the report. (Bibliography is not included in the word count).
12.	Appendices (Not always required)	Additional relevant information. May include interview questions, surveys, glossary etc. (Appendices are not included in the word count).

Types of Research Report

"Research report can vary differently in its length, type and purpose. Kerlinger (2004) states that the results of a research investigation can be presented in number of ways via a technical report, a popular report, a monograph or at times even in the form of oral presentation." Some typology of research reports is more popular for business purposes can be as:

1. Formal and Informal report
2. Written and Oral report
3. Internal and external report
4. long and short report

5. Descriptive and Analytical report
6. Technical and popular report

But, for the academic report like Thesis, GRP or Project reports, only either descriptive or analytical report is prepared. A short description of each type of description and analytical report is given below:

1. Descriptive Report

In descriptive report, researcher describes the facts, trends or opinions experienced or gathered during the research work. In such reports, data presentation and analysis are more importantly presented. Such reports are more suitable in case of describing current situations, etc. It is more popular method of report writing.

2. Analytical report

As name given analytical, such reports are prepared with analysing and interpretation of the facts or trends or situations. This means analytical report is one step ahead than descriptive reports. Such reports follow the scientific investigation and reporting. Analytical reports also recommend some measures to improve the situation with stating different problems on the situation. Policy research and managerial research which are normally funded by any agencies seeking solution of prevailing problems demand analytical report.

Points to be taken into consideration while writing a Research Report

Research report is a channel of communicating the research findings to the readers of the report. A good research report is one which does this task efficiently and effectively. As such it must be prepared keeping the following precautions in view:

- While determining the length of the report, one should keep in view the fact that it should be long enough to cover the subject but short enough to maintain interest.
- A research report should not be dull; it should be such as to sustain reader's interest.
- Abstract terminology and technical jargon should be avoided in a research report.
- Objective of the study, the nature of the problem, the methods employed and the analysis techniques adopted must all be clearly stated in the beginning of the report in the form of introduction.
- Readers are often interested in acquiring a quick knowledge of the main findings and as such the report must provide a ready availability of the findings. For this purpose, charts, graphs and the statistical tables may be used for the various results in the main report in addition to the summary of important findings.
- The layout of the report should be well thought out and must be appropriate and in accordance with the objective of the research problem.
- The reports should be free from grammatical mistakes and must be prepared strictly in accordance with the techniques of composition of report-writing such as the use of quotations, footnotes, documentation, proper punctuation and use of abbreviations in footnotes and the like.
- A research report should show originality and should necessarily be an attempt to solve some intellectual problem. It must contribute to the solution of a problem and must add to the store of knowledge.
- Appendices should be enlisted in respect of all the technical data in the report.
- Bibliography of sources consulted is a must for a good report and must necessarily be given.

Report Checklist

The main thoughts of research report writing are discussed in detail above while the following points as “Report Checklist” are important to recall the techniques of report writing which are as under-

- ✓ Have you determined what type of report to write?
- ✓ Have you determined the structure/ headings of your report?
- ✓ Have you collected the materials/ information you need to write the report?
- ✓ Have you drafted a timeline to complete the report on time?
- ✓ Have you written a draft and edited it carefully?
- ✓ Are all parts of the report, including appendices, completed?
- ✓ Have you submitted it on time and in the correct format?
- ✓ Have you kept a copy of your submitted report?

Conclusion

Research report is the final stage of every research in which research procedure, analysis, findings and so forth aspects of research endeavours are presented in organized and systematic way. It is the process of scientific and professional communication regarding research findings. The general purpose of research report is to convey the sufficient details of research works. It not only convinces the readers but let them known about the findings of already carried out research or project work or the purpose of the work have been done. Writing a report is both an art as well as science so that it pertains certain skills, rules and format suited for proper delivery in orderly and scientific manner.