Developing your report-writing skills
Format and some useful ideas

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A Webinar Presentation to Muscat College Students on 22 December 2020
Agenda...

- **Why?** Purpose and Future
- **What?** Format & Structure
- **How?** The Writing Process
- **Where & When?** Opportunities for personal advancement & effectiveness
- **Q&A** – Other aspects & reflections

Developing your report writing skills
Note some important words....

- **Developing**... is a life-long matter...
- You(r) – it’s about you, you, you!
- **Report-writing**... (intellectual/academic/research)
- **Skills**... employability/jobs/career
- **Format**... structure/system – follow the **required standards**
- **Ideas**... hints/techniques/methods

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A summary of my key ideas...

- Shape your future / career – pay real attention to improving your report-writing skills
- To be original/novel – read widely – reading culture
- Avoid plagiarism – it’s a serious misconduct.
- Communicate effectively / clearly – first, understand the purpose / questions / objectives of your assignment
- Inform qualitatively/ relevantly/ realistically
- Be concise with your reports
- Developing your report writing skills - Act Here & Now!
- Participate in emerging training opportunities

22 December 2020
Developing your report-writing skills...

Why?
Why you need to develop your report-writing skills?.../1

Developing your report writing skills

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Why you need to develop your report-writing skills?.../2

✓ **Global Vision** – sustainable society – preparing for future generations

✓ **Oman’s Vision 2040** – Diversified, inclusive economy

✓ **Muscat College Vision & Mission**

- **VISION**: To be a dynamic institution that is **distinctive** in its focus on providing education **for sustainable future**

- **MISSION**: To provide **lifelong learning** supported through **teaching, research, training and community engagement**
Why you need to develop your report-writing skills?

- Students, academics, managers/professionals write regularly – key tool for academic and professional assessment
- **Employability** - key tool for learning and development in the workplace...
- Valuable skill for the **knowledge economy** – driven by first-rate innovative research + the **Project economy**
- **Many governments now reward Universities for research** - Ranking of Universities – ranked according the amount of funding and publications
Why you need to develop your report-writing skills?...(same) in another university 5 years ago!

ACADEMIC REPORT WRITING - Format and some useful ideas

Presentation at the Interactive Session with UG and PG students held at PES University, Bangalore South Campus, Electronic City, Bangalore 560100, India, on December 21, 2015

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December 21, 2015 @ PES University, Bangalore, India
Why you need to develop your report-writing skills?...

☐ Academically...

✓ Case/issue/project-based assignment reports
✓ Group reports
✓ Even your exam paper – is a form of report – it should be well-structured, and your key points written / explained clearly...
✓ Dissertation/exit projects / Research proposals
✓ Grant proposals
✓ Conferences – huge networking opportunities for shaping your future
✓ Research publications – huge profile opportunities for shaping your future

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Developing your report writing skills
Why you need to develop your report-writing skills?...

✓ **Academic Excellence**: “If you want to do well in written assignments at university, it is not enough to have good ideas and well-researched information, your ideas must be written clearly” (Emphasis mine)

Accessed: 21 December 2020]

- What do you think of reports receiving comments like these from your assessors/reviewers:

  - “Not relevant;” “Not logical”; “I don’t understand”; “Not organised”; “No reading flow”; etc.
Developing your report-writing skills...

What?
“Report” means what?

- A *written* description/account and analysis
- Audience please! **Purpose** – **Users** of your report - information/event/issue/topic/project/proposal/pitch/situation/episode
- Formal writing – sharpens your thinking, stimulates your creativity, enables you communicate to your audience
- Documents your research process and results
- Contribution to knowledge – fact-finding
- **Systematic** – *format*; e.g., title, sections, headings, subheadings, etc.

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*Developing your report writing skills*
How would you describe a good report?
How would you describe a good report?

- Abstract/Executive summary
- Attractive – great, precise title, neatly typed, good paper, relevant diagrams and graphs.
- Balanced language – simple, basic, technical (but not too technical!) and befitting the subject/issue addressed.
- Concise/Brief to the point, no redundant sentence, no repetition of facts. The best sentence to express an idea is not necessarily the longest one.
- Accurate – Valid, reliable, scientific, factual, evidence-based, not imaginary or sentimental.
- Practical – Recommendations/implications/suggestions are relevant to the subject and implementable – Linkage with literature review will add more substance to it.
- Wholesome – Release useful hints, caveats, regarding difficulties or shortcomings encountered to assist future investigators.
- References
Developing your report-writing skills...

How?
First, try to read widely...

• Embrace an *active reading culture*

• Familiarity with the works of other authors/writers will give you valuable insights into how to do yours successfully.

• Research gap could be more easily identified through wide readership.
Develop yourself ... read widely...

Developing your report writing skills
Make good use of the library resources…/2

- **The Economist** (2015, March/April). The world is going to university, pp. 11-12.

  - Academic report writing – format and some useful ideas by Aro-Gordon (2015) – see the link to the ppts opposite


- Peer-reviewed international Journals
- University of Stirling Management School Understanding Consumers (MKTUMUC) **Literature Review** Lecture Notes, 2020

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*Developing your report writing skills*
Make good use of the library resources...

- University of Stirling Portal – Library Resources, Emerald Journals, S&P Capital IQ
- Turnitin.com
- Index cards

- Oman Virtual Science Library – Masader.om
- Grammarly.com
- Using paraphrasing tools?
Make good use of the library resources… databases /4

- Science Direct
- IEEE
- ACM
- CiteSeerX
- JSTOR
- Emerald Insight
- EbscoHost
- Semantic Scholar

- Worldwidescience
- PubMed
- PubChem
- Cochrane Library
- CINHAL
- Researchgate & Google Scholar
- Masader
- Web of Science
Format/structure – general principles

- Logical presentation and flow of reading from the title of the report to the end.
- **Sources of information MUST be acknowledged** - There must be a corresponding entry in your reference list for every in-text citation in your report.
- **Follow structured format**; e.g., title, sections, headings, sub-headings, etc. Generally: **INTRODUCTION / BODY / CONCLUSION**
- **Proofreading** – Pay attention to details – ensure professional presentation, free from spelling/grammatical issues.
# Format/structure – general principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Title/topic page**   | - Titles are labels, not sentences. Keep them simple, brief, explicit, and (perhaps) catchy!  
                        | - Avoid jargons and acronyms  
                        | - Word counts                                                                                                                                 |
| **Executive summary**  | - Purpose, scope, process/methodology/findings, conclusions/implications                                                            |
| **Body/content**       | - Content page  
                        | - Number and list all sections/subsections/headers/sub-headings with traceable page numbers                                           |
| **Introduction**       | - Background information, purpose and significance of the report, state how your report is organised.                                 |

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Executive summary – The BPMFC mnemonic  
(Ramadass & Aruni, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>Background information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Purpose – the report's principal activity/analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Methodology – explained in the next slide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Findings – the key results of your study/analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Conclusions – relevance/implications of your study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Developing your report writing skills
# The main body/text of your report...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>- Review of the body of knowledge / concepts / theories / empirical studies related to your topic and purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Make sure to align with the overall objectives of your report/research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The gap in knowledge to be filled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>- Document the study process / strategy, data sources, sampling system and data analysis approach and justification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>- Presentation of your findings and related discussions / arguments / inferences <strong>(critical thinking)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- How are your findings aligned or different from what we already know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Literature review is about evaluating what has been done previously in the topic area...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Beginning</strong> [outline of the issues],</th>
<th>NOT a review of everything! Only pertinent literature is required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle</strong> [analysis and synthesis]</td>
<td>-Identify key areas of interest about a topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of existing research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Highlight potential gaps in existing knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>End</strong> [summarising the issues, differences, paradoxes, dilemmas, and questions to be resolved]</td>
<td>Synthesises: Try to bring things together, cross referencing different sources/sections to create something new.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A word about your topic...

- Topic should be motivating/personally interesting, *unique / original*
- Is it researchable? Controversial? Will you be able to obtain moderate amount of data and good academic literature?
- Finetune ideas with your teacher/supervisor
Formatting aspects...

- **Script font and paper** - e.g., 12pt, Times New Roman or Arial?

- **Margins** – Subject to the recipient's specific requirements, the general rule for typed reports in A4 paper are: 3.81cm (1.5 inches) on the left and 2.5cm (1 inch) on all the other sides (Gurumani, 2010).

- **Spacing**: single- or double-spaced? Typing in double space is generally advised. O

- Pagination. o Binding. □

- **Note**: Follow all the relevant editorial / assignment/exam/proposal guidelines carefully
Use of tables and diagrams....

- Your Table should be placed as immediately as possible next to its first introduction in the text.
- A paragraph should not be broken for the sake of placing a Table.
- Every Table should have a caption/precise title placed above or below the Table (depending on the editorial prescriptions)
- All the Tables in a document should be serially numbered (Arabic or Roman) for easy identification.
Use of tables and diagrams.../2

- Diagrams, (pictures), graphs, tables, mathematical models – *keep them simple and relevant within main text, otherwise, they should go into an appendix.*

- **Question:** Should we use both a Table and a Graph in the same paper? **Answer:** Presenting the *same data* in a Table *and* in a Diagram is not encouraged – never allowed in a journal (Gurumani, 2010).

- You may use a Figure (graph / chart) where you *need* to highlight a trend or do a comparative analysis.
Referencing / citation & English style

- Referencing — be consistent
  - APA (American Psychological Association) style?
  - Harvard style?
    https://www.citethisforme.com/harvard-referencing
  - Check (and double check!) to ensure that all your in-text citations are detailed (alphabetically) in the section listing your references.

- British or American style
  - Choose one style and be consistent with it throughout your report
Drafting and revising...

- **Plan/plan/plan!** “Begin with the end in mind” – Stephen Covey
- **Information-gathering**: Keeping accurate records of published references that you want to use (or used) in your report.
- **Flexibility/creativity** – Be open to fresh ideas as they emerge – let the emerging ideas flow!
Structuring the report – Work with a template to start with and follow the outline in terms of headings and subheadings.

Producing the first draft – A useful result-oriented flow could be:

- Main Text → Conclusion → Introduction → Summary!

NOTE: Process-wise, styling/formatting/graphics can be done later – only ensure that you remember to do it

- Brevity / stick to the word limit – conciseness, coherence, flow of reading...

- Maintain best-known standards – grammar, spelling, style

Revise, Revise, Revise & Revise – do not rush your submission – this means to start early
As per the current policy to protect the integrity of coursework assessments, only ONE draft report may be reviewed by your teacher.

Referencing/citations could be improved with good quality academic and industry materials and your style should be consistent with the University/College’s prescription given in your course/module outline.

Remember to page your document and stick to the prescribed word limit.

It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that the report is your ORIGINAL work. In this regard, I would advise you to confirm your (Turnitin) similarity percentage in time, be satisfied with the originality of your work before making your final submission to your the designated site.

It is the student’s responsibility to submit the report directly to the designated site before the deadline specified on the site (Canvas or Moodle).
Drafting and revising...

• Understand the purpose of the report
• Understand what you read
• Paraphrase sentences, not words – still, you should provide proper (full) acknowledgement to avoid plagiarism

• Note the key points – the value of your work will be affected if omitted
• Write your own version
• References - Note full details of your sources, author, date, etc. (APA, Harvard, etc.)

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Drafting and revising.../5

• **Report honestly** - Honesty is still the best policy

• **Clarity** is very key to scientific writing and there is no room or need for ornamentation in scientific writing!
  (Ramadass & Aruni, 2014)

• **No ego trip** – You should try to avoid the use of personal pronouns such as *I, we, you, me, my, ours, us*. Rather, focus on the issue and evidence-based solutions.

• **Selectivity** - select only the most important information for inclusion in your report
• **Concentrate on facts**
  • Avoid over-claims/assertions
  • Be more positive – less overly critical
  • Ensure flow of reading – link your paragraphs
  • **Focus** on your purpose/project objectives – be less generic with your content

- For brevity/ conciseness, use:
  - Simple words
  - Short phrases
  - Short sentences
  - Short paragraphs
Developing your report-writing skills...

Where & When?
Developing your report writing skills...Act HERE and NOW!

1. **Participate in report writing competitions** – e.g., Pearl Initiative, Dubai, 2021 CBPOMS students report writing competition, etc.
2. Participate in the Research Council of Oman’s *(TRC)* 2021 Call for Research Proposal
3. Participate in Research Conferences and Publications – e.g., your dissertations, assignment projects (subject to approvals)
4. Take your *assignment reports and projects* for your University degree programmes more seriously
5. Participate in *professional bodies / business clubs* – where you can hone your report writing skills
6. Think of other opportunities to ACT NOW!

22 December 2020
Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation announces the submission of research proposals call 2021 for the following programs:

- Research Grants for PhD holders or Equivalents (RG)
- Graduate Research Grants for Master and Bachelor holders (GRG)
- Undergraduates Research Grants for undergraduate students (URG)

**Important Date:** The application deadline is 30th April 2021

For more information, please Email: reshmy@muscatcollege.edu.om
Concluding notes...

- **Shape your future / career** – pay real attention to improving your report-writing skills
- To be original/novel – read widely – reading culture
- Avoid plagiarism – it’s a serious misconduct.
- Communicate effectively / clearly – first, understand the purpose / questions / objectives of your assignment
- Inform qualitatively/ relevantly/ realistically
- Be concise with your reports
- **Developing your report writing skills - Act Here & Now!**
- Participate in emerging training opportunities
Thank you

Developing your report writing skills
Q & A

Developing your report writing skills