FORMAL REPORT WRITING

PLANNING, WRITING AND ORGANIZING A REPORT

Writing report is no different than sitting down to write a letter in terms of the approach taken.

1. Determine your purpose(s).
2. Consider your audience.
3. Analyze the problem(s).
4. Conduct your research.
5. Evaluate your results.
6. Prepare your outline.

1. Determine Your Purpose(s)

a) what need will your finished report will satisfy?
   - report to the client
   - reference for future cases
   - the rationale for the legal costs
   - an explanation of why the case should/should not be pursued
   - all of the above?

b) what decisions will be made as a result of your report?
   - to appeal or not to appeal?
   - to continue on as legal counsel for the client?

c) is the report informational, interpretive or analytical?
   - are you simply “reporting” on what happened or are you also offering your opinion and recommendations?

d) what needs to be determined?
- is it the justification/explanation of the judge's decision?
- the estimated cost?
- explanation of the course taken and the reasons the course failed or succeeded

You can narrow the focus of your investigation where possible by sorting out:
- which issue(s) is(are) important to your case and why
- who is involved
- where the potential problem(s) is(are)

When all of this is done, prepare a written statement of purpose to help guide all other efforts in putting the report together.

2. Consider Your Audience
- who are the primary recipients?
- who are the secondary recipients?
- the needs of all of the readers must be considered

3. Analyze the Problem/Issue(s)
- determine what information you need (preliminary work for this is done when determining the purpose of the report)
  a. what is(are) the issue(s)?
  b. what caused the issue(s) to arise?
  c. how will the issue(s) be resolved/argued/explained/defended?

- this becomes your research checklist
- try to factor your problems/issues into a series of questions for analysis

4. Conduct Your Research
- identify primary and secondary sources of research
• primary sources include unpublished information such as surveys, interviews, experiments, questionnaires, personal observation and organizational files to name a few

• secondary sources include published information such as books, magazines, newspapers, government reports, etc.

• both sources are required in order to prepare a formal report

• ALL sources used are referenced in your formal report on a list that can be called a source list, bibliography, reference list, et.

5. Prepare a Work Plan

• use it as your work outline

• use it to confirm purpose, nature, methods, and other important considerations with the person who authorized the report or the intended receiver

6. Conduct the Research & Analyze the Results

• have you collected all of the information you need to answer your reader’s questions about each issue as defined in the purpose of the report?

• what is the answer to the initial research question?

• what gaps in information exist? why?

• what conclusions can be drawn from the information?

• are they reasonable and logical?

• what action(s) should be taken?

7. Conclusions & Recommendations

• once you have analyzed your results and you are satisfied with them, you can formulate conclusions and recommendations

COMPONENTS OF A FORMAL REPORT

A. Front Matter/Prefatory Parts

B. Body of Report
C. Back Matter/Supplementary Parts

FRONT MATTER/PREFATORY PARTS

- cover
- title fly
- title page
- letter of authorization
- letter of acceptance
- letter/memo of transmittal
- table of contents
- list of illustrations

Cover

- gives report a professional appearance (often printed on heavier stock)
- includes title and subtitle (author’s name and date are optional)

Title Fly

- contains only the report title and is optional, follows cover page

Title Page

- contains title and subtitle
- “prepared for” name, title, address of person for whom report is intended
- “prepared by” author’s name, title, company, dept., address, phone, fax
- date of submission

Letter of Authorization/Acceptance

- these items are included if applicable (usually when considerable time and money are being used in preparing the report and/or sensitive or negative information is involved)
Letter of Transmittal

- also called a cover letter, officially conveys report to the reader
- identifies the report being sent, the person to whom it’s directed and reason for sending
- communicates the purpose of the report but detailed summary and conclusions are not included here as they form part of the executive summary
- written in informal tone, also a good place to acknowledge work of others
- generally close with goodwill messages
- should include all elements of a formal letter, even if not being mailed (inside address for example)

Table of Contents

- list of the report’s primary and secondary headings
- reveals report’s overall structure
- page numbers are placed next to each heading – leaders (…….) join the heading to the page number

List of Illustrations

- appears on a separate page immediately following the table of contents
- lists all figures and tables (visual aids) that are included in the document
- may be referred to as “exhibits”
- title and page number of every illustration must be included

BODY OF REPORT

- executive summary
- introduction
- body/text discussion
- summary
• conclusions

• recommendations

**Synopsis or Executive Summary**

• an overview of what the report says, it is a condensed version of the report

• it is one of the most important parts of a report as it is often referred to in order to reference critical/key points

• in addition, it is often used as the main document circulated to several people when the entire report is too lengthy

• the summary is either descriptive or informative in nature

• descriptive summaries are synopses that act like expanded table of contents that tell the reader what to expect in the pages to follow – they state what the report is intended to accomplish in terms of scope and purpose (scope refers to any limitations that define the report's coverage)

• informative summaries are an abbreviated version of the actual report including conclusions, recommendations and a description of the purpose, scope and methods used

• information in an executive summary is presented in the same order that it comes in the actual report

• should not contain tables, charts, footnotes, jargon, abbreviations or exhibits

• should contain headings that will help the reader

• bulleted and numbered lists are appropriate to use in executive summaries

• can be up to 1/10 of the length of the actual report although it is recommended that it be shorter if at all possible

**Introduction**

• acts as an opening to your entire report

• has six basic functions: clarify the subject (definitions, background information, historical background), state the purpose of the report (e.g. your report provides an overview or presents a new approach to an old problem), define the scope of the report (how broad your coverage of the information
will be), describe your plan for developing your subject (chronological, cause & effect), clarify your research methods (e.g. describe a survey that was the source of your data), set the style of the report (use of informal/formal language)

- most challenging part of the report to write, often written after the report is completed

Body/Text Discussion

- this is the substance of the report
- record of your ideas, content of your data (arranged by chronological, cause and effect, deductive/inductive methods)
- headings are used to guide the reader through the content which follows whatever order allows the information to be presented in a logical sequence

Summary

- condenses the most important information from the report
- presented in the same order as the information appears in the body of the report

Conclusions

- logical results of the evidence presented in the report
- must be linked to purpose and methods described in the introduction
- to write effective conclusions: a) assume that your conclusions will be read independently of the rest of the report; restate your purpose and methods avoiding jargon/abbreviations b) organize your results according to how they are presented in the body of your report (usually, most important conclusions first)

Recommendations

- specific actions you suggest as a result of the information you have presented
- should be financially realistic and appropriate to the problem
must flow logically from the findings of your report (findings must support the recommendations)

BACK MATTER/SUPPLEMENTARY PARTS

- bibliography
- appendices
- glossary
- index

Bibliography

- a list of references used in researching the report
- lists all references used, regardless of whether you cited them specifically in your report
- alphabetized

Appendices

- all supportive material, data, charts, etc., that are either secondary to the main issues in your report or that are too bulky to include in the body of the report
- examples include surveys, interviews, text of legal statues, etc.
- each appendix should be limited to one type of supplemental material e.g. Appendix A – Statutes, Appendix B – Court Documents, Appendix C – Witness Statements, etc.

Glossary

- an alphabetized list of words with definitions or explanations that are unfamiliar or technical in nature

Index

- an alphabetized list of report topics that includes the page on which the topic appears
- usually reserved for long, complex reports