

Project Management Resource Series **How to Write Effective Investigation Reports**

Somewhere along the line, most engineering projects require a report encapsulating a study, assessment, analysis, inspection or review for a client who needed a question(s) answered. Though some people may not think of report writing as “Project Management” at first glance, we see report writing as an important part of project communication and as such it is crucial to do it well. As we all know, poor communication is at the root of nearly all project failures!

While much has changed over the years with the means we can use to present information, the way the human brain assimilates information has not really changed. We generally recommend those preparing investigation reports use the time proven structure outlined below. The headings may be changed somewhat to suit the needs of the report, but the purpose of each section shouldn't change.

Executive Summary (for long reports)

A very brief (ideally less than one page long) encapsulation of the purpose of the report, what was done, the conclusions arrived at and recommendations for action.

Table of Contents (for long reports)

Table of Figures (for long reports)

Glossary (if audience is not familiar with terms, acronyms etc)

Introduction and Background

A few paragraphs explaining why the report has been prepared, who was involved and any key background information required to provide the reader with a context for information in the report. This is where you “*Tell them what you're going to tell them*”. Introduction and Background can be two separate sections for long or complicated reports.

Discussion

This is the longest part of any report and is where what was done and any results are presented. For long reports, it is important to break the Discussion down into logical and stepwise subsections to help the reader understand. “*Tell them*” is the purpose of the Discussion section. An effective Discussion will communicate the conclusions of the investigation without necessarily underlining them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions of the investigation are summarized here. They must be supported and follow logically from the information presented in the Discussion. Recommendations of the investigation are also presented after the conclusions (can be in a separate section). They must follow logically from the conclusions. While paragraph format may be used here, if there are many conclusions and recommendations, it is best to present them in numbered lists. This section is essentially where you “*Tell them what you told them*” in the Discussion section and provide suggested action or closure.

References (if required)

Appendices (if required)

Happy report writing!