

Report Writing Guide (UK University Guide)

A practical, no-fluff guide to structuring and writing a formal report — from front matter through findings and analysis to a clear, actionable conclusion.

□ Reading time: 30–35 minutes

Report Writing Guide (UK University Guide)

A practical, no-fluff guide to structuring and writing a formal report — from front matter through findings and analysis to a clear, actionable conclusion.

□ **Featured Snippet Answer:** A UK university report is a formally structured document divided into front matter (title page, executive summary, table of contents), a main body (introduction, findings, analysis/discussion, conclusion and recommendations), and end matter (references, appendices). Unlike an essay, a report uses numbered headings, data-driven findings, and a structure a reader can navigate section by section rather than reading start to finish.

AI Overview Summary: Writing a strong UK university report means following a formally divided structure — front matter, main body, and end matter — with numbered headings, clearly presented findings, and analysis that interprets

those findings using relevant theory. Unlike an essay, a report is designed to be navigated rather than read straight through, and its executive summary must stand alone as a complete summary of the whole document. The most common weakness is writing a report as if it were an essay, with continuous prose and no clear structural signposting.

Quick Answer

Structure your report into three parts: front matter (title page, executive summary, table of contents), a main body (introduction, findings, analysis/discussion, conclusion and recommendations), and end matter (references, appendices). Use numbered headings and subheadings throughout, present data in labelled tables and figures, and write your executive summary last so it accurately summarises the whole document standalone.

Table of Contents

1. [What a Report Actually Is](#)
2. [Report vs Essay: Key Differences](#)
3. [Why Report Structure Matters](#)
4. [Types of Reports](#)
5. [The Overall Report Structure](#)
6. [Front Matter in Detail](#)
7. [Writing the Introduction](#)
8. [Presenting Findings](#)
9. [Writing Analysis and Discussion](#)
10. [Writing Conclusions and Recommendations](#)
11. [End Matter: References and Appendices](#)
12. [Word Count Distribution](#)
13. [The Report Writing Process](#)

14. [Formatting and Visual Presentation](#)
 15. [Common Lecturer Feedback](#)
 16. [Weak vs Strong Examples](#)
 17. [Subject-Specific Examples](#)
 18. [Common Mistakes](#)
 19. [Report Checklist](#)
 20. [Report Templates](#)
 21. [Practice Exercises](#)
 22. [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
 23. [Key Takeaways](#)
 24. [Conclusion](#)
-

What a Report Actually Is

A report is a formally structured document designed to present information, findings, and analysis in a way that a reader can navigate quickly, rather than one they must read from start to finish to understand. Where an essay builds a single continuous argument through connected paragraphs, a report is divided into clearly labelled, numbered sections that a reader can jump between depending on what they need.

This structural difference isn't cosmetic — it reflects a different purpose. Reports are modelled on real workplace and professional documents, where a busy reader might only read the executive summary and the recommendations, trusting that the full analysis is available in the body if they need to check it. This is why the executive summary is one of the most distinctive and important features of report writing: it must work as a complete, standalone summary of the entire document, not simply an introduction to what follows.

Reports also place more weight on visual presentation than essays typically do — tables, figures, numbered headings, and appendices are standard features, not optional extras. Learning to use these elements well is as much a part of report writing as the quality of your prose.

❑ **Expert Tip:** A good test of whether your report structure is working: could a reader find your key recommendation within 30 seconds of opening the document? If not, your structure and signposting need more work.

Report vs Essay: Key Differences

Feature	Essay	Report
Structure	Continuous argumentative prose	Numbered sections and subsections
Reading pattern	Read start to finish	Navigated section by section
Opening	Introduction with thesis statement	Executive summary that stands alone
Headings	Rare or none	Standard, numbered throughout
Visual elements	Minimal	Tables, figures, charts are standard
Voice	Often more discursive	Concise, direct, action-oriented
Ending	Reasoned judgement on a question	Recommendations for specific action

⚠ **Common Mistake:** Writing a report in essay style — continuous prose with no headings, and an introduction that functions like an essay's thesis-driven opening rather than a genuine executive summary. This is consistently one of the most common formatting errors in student reports.

Why Report Structure Matters

What Markers Look For	Why It Matters
Clear, logical section structure	Shows you understand the professional conventions of report writing
A standalone executive summary	Demonstrates you can summarise complex information concisely
Findings presented with appropriate data/visuals	Shows competence with the report format's core tools
Analysis that interprets findings using theory	Distinguishes a report from a purely descriptive data dump
Specific, actionable recommendations	Shows practical judgement, not just academic knowledge

❑ **Lecturer Advice:** Report marking criteria frequently include a specific "structure and presentation" category, separate from content quality. A well-structured report with slightly weaker content can sometimes outscore a well-researched report with poor structure, simply because structure is assessed independently.

Types of Reports

Report Type	Purpose	Typical Discipline
Business/ management report	Analyse a business problem and recommend action	Business, management

Report Type	Purpose	Typical Discipline
Technical report	Document a technical process, test, or system	Engineering, computer science
Lab report	Document an experiment's method, results, and conclusions	Sciences
Work placement/ internship report	Reflect on and evaluate a professional placement experience	Most vocational degrees
Research report	Present original research findings formally	Most disciplines at dissertation level
Consultancy-style report	Recommend action to a specific client or stakeholder	Business, management, some professional modules
Incident/audit report	Document and analyse a specific event or process review	Healthcare, engineering, compliance-focused modules

❑ **Lecturer Advice:** Different report types emphasise different sections — a lab report weights methodology and results heavily, while a consultancy-style report weights recommendations heavily. Check your assignment brief for which sections carry the most marks in your specific report type.

Report writing across disciplines

While the underlying structural principles of reports stay broadly consistent, the specific conventions and emphasis shift meaningfully between disciplines, and it's worth understanding these differences before assuming one template fits every assignment.

In business and management, reports tend to emphasise practical recommendations aimed at a specific decision-maker, often written as though addressing a named stakeholder (a CEO, a department head) rather than an academic marker. In engineering and computer science, technical reports place heavier weight on precise methodology and reproducibility — a reader should be able to follow your process closely enough to replicate or audit it. In the sciences, lab reports follow a especially rigid structure inherited from published research articles, with clearly separated method, results, and discussion sections, and a strong expectation that results are reported neutrally before any interpretation appears in the discussion.

Healthcare and nursing reports, particularly audit or incident reports, often incorporate reflective elements alongside data analysis, since professional practice in these fields explicitly values reflection as part of quality improvement. Education reports frequently centre on pupil or policy outcomes, often expected to engage with relevant educational theory alongside any quantitative data presented. Placement and internship reports are structurally distinct again, blending a more personal, reflective register with the same overall discipline of numbered sections and clear signposting.

□ **Expert Tip:** When in doubt about which discipline-specific conventions apply, look for a sample or template report provided by your module, or ask directly what previous cohorts' highest-scoring reports had in common structurally.

The Overall Report Structure

Most UK university reports follow a three-part overall structure: front matter, main body, and end matter — each containing standard component sections.

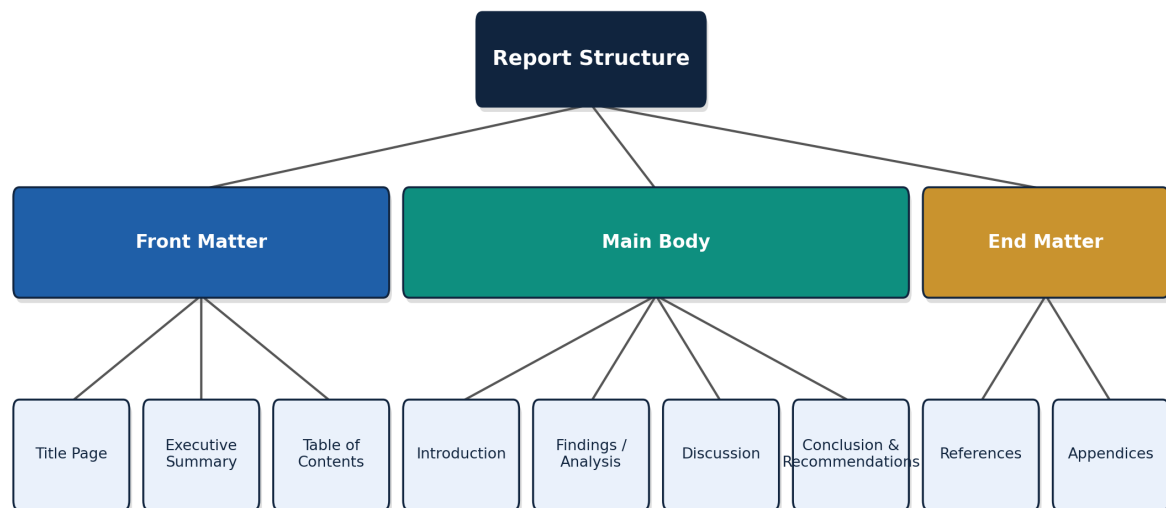


Figure 1: The overall structure of a formal report — front matter, main body, and end matter, each broken into their standard component sections.

Part	Contains	Purpose
Front matter	Title page, executive summary, table of contents	Orients the reader and summarises the whole document
Main body	Introduction, findings/analysis, discussion, conclusion and recommendations	Presents and interprets your work in full
End matter	References, appendices	Supports your main body with sources and supplementary detail

□ **Expert Tip:** Build this structure as a working skeleton before you start writing prose — insert your numbered headings first, then draft content underneath

each one. This keeps the report properly segmented rather than being an essay with headings retrofitted afterwards.

Front Matter in Detail

Element	What It Should Contain
Title page	Report title, your name/student number, module, word count, submission date
Executive summary	A complete, standalone summary of the purpose, method, key findings, and recommendations
Table of contents	Numbered sections and subsections with page numbers, generated automatically where possible

⚠ **Common Mistake:** Writing the executive summary as a teaser or introduction ("this report will discuss...") rather than as a genuine summary of the findings and recommendations themselves. A reader should be able to understand your report's key conclusions from the executive summary alone, without reading further.

📄 **Worked Example:** "This report analyses declining sales performance at [Company]'s regional retail division. Analysis of sales data, customer surveys, and competitor benchmarking identifies reduced digital marketing investment as the primary driver, compounded by increased competitive pricing pressure. The report recommends a 20% increase in digital marketing spend over two quarters, prioritising channels with the strongest customer engagement, alongside a phased review of pricing strategy."

Executive summary deep dive

A genuinely strong executive summary compresses four things into a short space: why the report exists, what method or approach was used to investigate it, what was found, and what should happen next. Missing any one of these four elements is usually what causes an executive summary to read as incomplete or as a disguised introduction.

Element	One-Sentence Test
Purpose	Could a reader state, from this alone, why the report was commissioned?
Method	Could a reader state, broadly, how the analysis was carried out?
Key findings	Could a reader state the single most important finding?
Recommendations	Could a reader state what action the report proposes?

❑ **Expert Tip:** Draft your executive summary by writing exactly one sentence for each of the four elements above, then expand each sentence slightly. This keeps the summary tightly focused rather than drifting into unnecessary detail.

Writing the Introduction

The report's introduction is distinct from its executive summary — where the executive summary stands alone as a complete overview, the introduction orients the reader into the body of the report specifically.

Introduction Element	Function
Background/context	Briefly establishes the situation prompting this report

Introduction Element	Function
Purpose/objectives	States precisely what the report aims to achieve
Scope	Clarifies what is and isn't covered
Structure overview	Briefly signposts how the report is organised

❑ **Expert Tip:** Keep the introduction free of findings or conclusions — its job is to set up the report, not to summarise it. That summarising work belongs in the executive summary, written separately.

Presenting Findings

The findings section presents what you discovered — through data analysis, research, or investigation — in a clear, organised way, generally before moving into interpretation and evaluation.

Presentation Method	Best Used For
Tables	Precise numerical data, comparisons across categories
Charts/graphs	Trends over time, proportions, comparative visual patterns
Bullet-point summaries	Discrete, non-numerical findings (e.g. themes from interviews)
Direct quotations	Qualitative research findings, stakeholder perspectives

⚠ **Common Mistake:** Presenting findings without labelling tables and figures properly (e.g. "Table 1: Regional Sales Performance, 2023–2025") or without

referring to them explicitly in your prose ("as shown in Table 1..."). Unlabelled or unreferenced visuals leave the reader unclear what they're meant to show.

❑ **Worked Example:** "As shown in Table 1, digital advertising spend fell by 40% between 2023 and 2025, while overall sector advertising spend rose by 15% over the same period."

Data visualisation best practice

Choosing the right visual format, and building it correctly, meaningfully affects how convincingly your findings land with a reader.

Best Practice	Why It Matters
Choose the simplest format that conveys the data clearly	Overly complex charts can obscure rather than clarify a finding
Label all axes, units, and legends	Unlabelled visuals force the reader to guess what they're looking at
Keep a consistent visual style throughout	Inconsistent colours, fonts, or chart types across figures look unpolished
Avoid 3D charts and unnecessary decoration	These distort perception of proportion and rarely add genuine clarity
Round figures sensibly	Excessive decimal precision rarely adds meaningful accuracy and clutters the visual

⚠ **Common Mistake:** Including a chart purely because the data was available, rather than because it clearly serves the report's argument. Every table or figure should earn its place by supporting a specific point in your prose.

Writing Analysis and Discussion

Where the findings section presents what you found, the analysis/discussion section interprets what it means — applying relevant theory, comparing findings against expectations, and evaluating significance.

Stage	Function
Restate the relevant finding	Draws the reader's attention to the specific data point being analysed
Apply theory or a framework	Explains the finding using an established model or concept
Evaluate significance	States how important this finding is relative to the report's overall purpose
Link to the next point	Connects to the following finding or theme

❑ **Worked Example:** "The 40% decline in digital advertising spend, considerably steeper than the wider sector's 15% increase, suggests the company's reduced market visibility is a company-specific issue rather than a reflection of broader market conditions. Applying the marketing mix framework, this points towards promotion as the most significant lever available to address the sales decline, ahead of pricing or product changes."

⚠ **Common Mistake:** Repeating the findings section's content in the discussion without adding genuine interpretation. Analysis requires explaining what the data means, not restating what it shows.

Common analytical frameworks used in reports

Choosing an appropriate analytical framework gives your discussion section a recognisable structure and signals to your marker that your interpretation is grounded

in established thinking rather than personal opinion. Different frameworks suit different report types and disciplines, so it's worth matching the tool to the task rather than defaulting to whichever framework you learned most recently.

Framework	Best Suited To	What It Reveals
SWOT analysis	Business, management reports	Internal strengths/weaknesses and external opportunities/threats
PESTLE analysis	Business, strategic management reports	Macro-environmental factors shaping a situation
Porter's Five Forces	Business, competitive strategy reports	Competitive pressure within an industry or market
Ratio analysis	Finance, accounting reports	Financial performance and position relative to benchmarks
Root cause analysis	Engineering, healthcare, incident/audit reports	Underlying causes behind an observed problem, not just symptoms
Statistical hypothesis testing	Lab and research reports	Whether observed differences are statistically significant
Gibbs' Reflective Cycle	Placement and reflective reports	Structured reflection on experience, feelings, and learning

❑ **Expert Tip:** Don't apply a framework mechanically just to tick a box — briefly explain why the framework you've chosen is appropriate for this specific report, and make sure every element of the framework you use actually connects back to your findings.

Writing Conclusions and Recommendations

Reports typically separate the conclusion (a summary judgement on what the analysis shows overall) from recommendations (specific proposed actions), sometimes as distinct sections.

Weak Recommendation	Strong Recommendation
"The company should improve its digital presence."	"The company should increase digital advertising spend by 20% over the next two quarters, focusing on the social media channels shown in Table 3 to have the highest customer engagement."
"Staff training should be reviewed."	"The company should introduce quarterly management training focused on feedback delivery, directly addressing the low manager support scores identified in the staff survey (Appendix B)."

 **Expert Tip:** Number your recommendations and order them by priority or feasibility. This mirrors professional report conventions and makes it easy for a reader to act on your report without re-reading the full analysis.

Prioritising and sequencing recommendations

When a report includes several recommendations, the order you present them in communicates priority whether you intend it to or not — readers naturally assume the first recommendation matters most. It's worth deciding this ordering deliberately rather than simply listing recommendations in the order they occurred to you while drafting.

Sequencing Approach	When to Use It
By impact	

Sequencing Approach	When to Use It
	When some recommendations address far more significant findings than others
By feasibility/cost	When budget or resourcing constraints mean quick wins should come first
By urgency	When some issues carry immediate risk (e.g. safety, compliance) that others don't
By dependency	When one recommendation must be implemented before another can succeed

□ **Worked Example:** "Recommendation 1 (immediate): revise the escalation protocol to address the identified safety risk. Recommendation 2 (within one quarter): introduce refresher training on the revised protocol. Recommendation 3 (within two quarters): review staffing levels on the affected ward, subject to budget approval."

End Matter: References and Appendices

Element	What It Contains	Best Practice
References	Full citation details for all sources used	Match your required referencing style consistently (Harvard, APA 7, etc.)
Appendices	Supplementary material (raw data, full survey results, detailed calculations)	Reference each appendix explicitly in your main body text

⚠ **Common Mistake:** Placing information essential to understanding your argument in an appendix, forcing the reader to flip back and forth. Appendices should contain supplementary detail, not material the reader needs to follow your core analysis.

Word Count Distribution

Typical Word-Count Distribution (Main Body)



Figure 2: A typical word-count distribution across a report's main body sections (proportions vary by module — always confirm against your brief).

Section	Typical Proportion of Main Body Word Count
Introduction	8–10%
Findings	20–25%
Analysis/Discussion	30–35%
Conclusion	10–12%
Recommendations	10–13%

□ **Lecturer Advice:** These proportions are typical, not fixed — a consultancy-style report might weight recommendations more heavily, while a lab report

weights methodology and findings more heavily. Always check your specific assignment brief.

The Report Writing Process

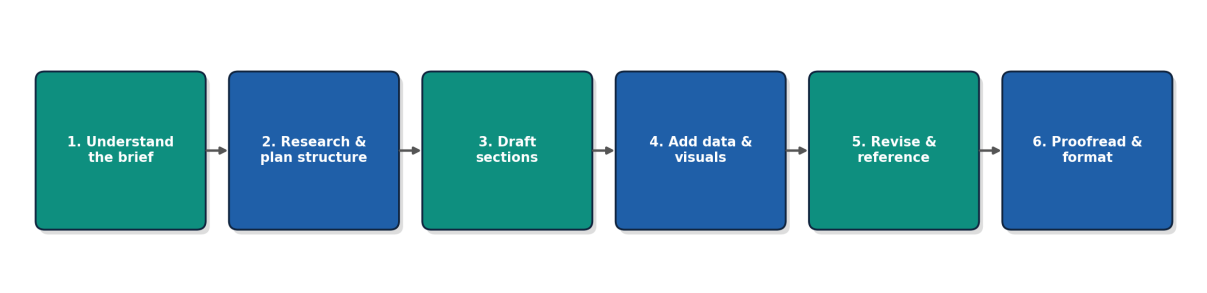


Figure 3: The report writing process, from understanding the brief to a fully proofread, correctly formatted final document.

Step	What Happens Here
1. Understand the brief	Confirm exactly what's required, including report type, sections, and word count
2. Research and plan structure	Gather your evidence and build your section-by-section skeleton
3. Draft sections	Write each section, ideally starting with the body rather than the executive summary
4. Add data and visuals	Insert clearly labelled tables, figures, and charts, referenced explicitly in your prose
5. Revise and reference	Check argument flow, add complete citations, and finalise your reference list
6. Proofread and format	Check numbering, headings, consistency, and adherence to your required format

❑ **Expert Tip:** Write your executive summary last, once the full report is finalised. It's the one section that must accurately reflect the entire document, which is only possible once everything else is settled.

Formatting and Visual Presentation

Formatting Element	Best Practice
Headings	Numbered consistently (1, 1.1, 1.2, 2, 2.1...) throughout
Tables and figures	Numbered and captioned (e.g. "Figure 2: ..."), referenced explicitly in the text
Fonts and spacing	Consistent throughout, matching your module's required format
Page numbers	Included from the introduction onwards, sometimes excluding the title page
Word count	Stated clearly, usually on the title page, and checked against your brief's inclusions/exclusions

⚠ **Common Mistake:** Inconsistent heading numbering or formatting across sections, which undermines the professional presentation reports are specifically assessed on.

Peer review and self-editing your report

Because reports are assessed partly on structure and presentation, a final structural review pass is worth treating as a distinct step, separate from proofreading for grammar and spelling.

Review Pass	What to Check
Structure pass	Every section present, correctly numbered, in the expected order for your report type
Navigation pass	Table of contents page numbers accurate, headings consistent in style throughout
Data pass	Every table/figure labelled, captioned, and referenced explicitly at least once in the text
Traceability pass	Every recommendation clearly linked to a specific finding or piece of evidence
Final proofread	Grammar, spelling, and formatting consistency, ideally after a break from the document

❑ **Expert Tip:** Where possible, ask a peer to read only your executive summary and tell you what they think your top recommendation is. If they can't identify it confidently, your executive summary needs further tightening.

Common Lecturer Feedback

Common Feedback Comment	What It Usually Means	How to Fix It
"Reads like an essay"		

Common Feedback Comment	What It Usually Means	How to Fix It
	Continuous prose with no clear section structure	Rebuild using numbered headings and a proper front/main/end matter structure
"Executive summary doesn't stand alone"	Reads as an introduction rather than a genuine summary	Rewrite to summarise findings and recommendations, written last
"Findings not properly presented"	Data lacks labelled tables/figures or explicit reference in text	Add captions and reference each visual explicitly in your prose
"Analysis too descriptive"	Discussion restates findings without interpreting them	Add theory application and evaluation of significance
"Recommendations too vague"	Proposals lack specificity, resourcing, or clear links to findings	Add concrete detail and reference the specific finding each recommendation addresses

⚠ **Common Mistake:** By far the most common comment on UK student reports — "reads like an essay." This almost always traces back to missing numbered structure and a genuine standalone executive summary.

Using feedback from previous assignments to improve your report

One of the most reliable ways to improve a report before you even start drafting is to look back at written feedback from your previous assignments — especially previous reports — and check whether the same comments keep recurring.

Step	What to Do
Collect	Gather written feedback from your last two or three assignments, particularly any reports
Pattern-check	Look for repeated comments, not just one-off remarks specific to a single piece of work
Prioritise	Address the most frequently repeated comment first, since it's likely your biggest current weakness
Verify	Before submission, check your draft specifically against that recurring comment

❑ **Expert Tip:** If you consistently receive comments about structure rather than content, that's a signal to spend disproportionately more time planning your heading structure before drafting, rather than revising content after the fact.

Weak vs Strong Examples

Weak	Strong
"This report will look at the company's sales performance and discuss some possible reasons for the decline."	"This report analyses the causes of declining sales performance at [Company]'s regional retail division, identifying reduced digital marketing investment as the primary driver and recommending a 20% increase in digital spend over two quarters."
"Sales went down. This might be because of marketing or pricing."	"Sales declined by 12% between 2023 and 2025, a period during which digital advertising spend fell by 40% against a 15% sector-wide increase, suggesting a company-specific rather than market-wide cause."

❑ **Expert Tip:** Notice the strong versions state specific figures and a clear judgement, rather than describing the topic in general or hedging with vague possibilities.

Subject-Specific Examples

❑ **Business:** "Sales data analysis (Table 2) identifies a 12% decline over the review period, disproportionately concentrated in regions where digital advertising spend fell most sharply, supporting a recommendation to prioritise digital marketing investment in those specific regions first."

❑ **Engineering:** "Load testing results (Appendix A) show the reinforced beam design exceeding required safety margins by 15%, supporting its recommendation for use in the final structural specification over the standard alternative."

❑ **Computer Science:** "System performance benchmarking (Figure 3) shows response times increasing by 300% under peak load, identifying database query optimisation as the highest-priority technical recommendation in this report."

❑ **Nursing/Healthcare:** "Audit findings (Table 4) show a 25% incidence of delayed escalation across reviewed cases, supporting this report's recommendation for mandatory structured communication training (SBAR) across the ward."

❑ **Marketing:** "Campaign performance data (Figure 2) shows a strong awareness uplift but negligible conversion improvement, supporting this report's recommendation to revise the campaign's call-to-action strategy."

❑ **Finance:** "Ratio analysis (Table 3) shows a current ratio of 0.8, below the recommended 1.0 threshold, supporting this report's recommendation to review short-term liability management."

❑ **Education:** "Survey data (Appendix C) shows 68% of pupils reporting improved engagement following the formative feedback intervention, supporting its wider rollout as this report's primary recommendation."

❑ **Sciences (Lab Report):** "Results (Table 1) show a statistically significant difference between treatment and control groups ($p < 0.05$), supporting rejection of the null hypothesis stated in the introduction."

❑ **Placement/Internship Report:** "Reflecting on the stakeholder communication challenges encountered during weeks 3–5, this report recommends future placement students receive structured briefing on organisational reporting lines before starting client-facing tasks."

Common Mistakes

#	Mistake	Why It Weakens the Report
1	Writing in continuous essay-style prose without numbered headings	Fails to meet the core structural expectation of the report format

#	Mistake	Why It Weakens the Report
2	Executive summary written as an introduction rather than a summary	Fails to work as a standalone overview of the whole document
3	Writing the executive summary first, before the report is finalised	Risks it becoming inaccurate once the report develops further
4	Unlabelled or unreferenced tables and figures	Leaves the reader unclear what visuals are meant to show
5	Analysis that restates findings without interpreting them	Fails to demonstrate genuine critical thinking
6	Vague recommendations with no specific action, resourcing, or timeframe	Fails to demonstrate practical judgement
7	Inconsistent heading numbering	Undermines the professional presentation reports are specifically assessed on
8	Placing essential information only in appendices	Forces the reader to search for content needed to follow your core argument
9	Overlong introduction that duplicates the executive summary	Wastes word count that could be used for analysis
10	Findings and analysis blended into one undifferentiated section	Makes it harder for the reader to distinguish data from interpretation
11	Inconsistent referencing style throughout	An easily avoidable but common mark deduction
12	Failing to check the specific report type expected (e.g. consultancy vs lab report)	Risks producing a structure misaligned with what's actually required
13		

#	Mistake	Why It Weakens the Report
	Ignoring word count guidance for individual sections	Can result in disproportionate over- or under-development of specific sections
14	Recommendations that don't connect back to specific findings	Reads as generic advice rather than evidence-based conclusions
15	Overuse of first person where a more formal register is expected	Check your module's specific conventions before drafting
16	Failing to number recommendations when there are several	Makes it harder for a reader to reference or prioritise them
17	Copying table/figure formats without adapting captions to your specific content	Leaves visuals poorly labelled and harder to interpret
18	Not proofreading heading consistency across the full document	Small numbering errors are easily overlooked but highly visible to markers
19	Treating the conclusion as a simple restatement of the introduction	Misses the opportunity to synthesise your analysis into a clear final judgement
20	Failing to state word count on the title page where required	A simple, easily fixed omission that some markers specifically check for
21	Including a chart or table purely because the data was available, not because it serves the argument	Clutters the report without adding analytical value
22	Overusing 3D or decorative chart styles	Distorts perception of proportion and rarely adds genuine clarity
23	Not matching report conventions to the specific discipline or report type	Risks a mismatch between structure and marker expectations
24		

#	Mistake	Why It Weakens the Report
	Skipping a dedicated structural review pass before submission	Structural errors (numbering, missing captions) are easily missed during a purely grammar-focused proofread
25	Writing recommendations before finishing the analysis they should be based on	Risks recommendations that don't fully reflect the finished discussion

⚠ **Common Mistake:** Treating structure as a formality to add after the content is written, rather than the skeleton content should be drafted into from the start. Reports built section-by-section from the outset are consistently better organised than essays retrofitted with headings.

Report Checklist

☐ Printable Report Checklist

- ☐ My report is divided into front matter, main body, and end matter with numbered headings throughout
- ☐ My executive summary stands alone as a complete summary of findings and recommendations
- ☐ All tables and figures are numbered, captioned, and referenced explicitly in my prose
- ☐ My analysis interprets findings using relevant theory, rather than just restating data
- ☐ My recommendations are specific, prioritised, and clearly linked to specific findings
- ☐ My references are complete and consistently formatted

- ☐ My appendices contain supplementary detail only, not content essential to my core argument
- ☐ I have checked my word count against my brief's specific inclusions and exclusions
- ☐ I have proofread heading numbering and formatting for consistency throughout

Report Templates

☐ **Standard Business Report Template**

- ☐ Title page, executive summary, table of contents
- ☐ 1. Introduction (background, purpose, scope)
- ☐ 2. Findings (data and evidence, clearly presented)
- ☐ 3. Analysis/Discussion (theory applied to findings)
- ☐ 4. Conclusion
- ☐ 5. Recommendations (numbered, prioritised)
- ☐ References, Appendices

☐ **Lab Report Template**

- ☐ Title, abstract
- ☐ 1. Introduction (background, hypothesis)
- ☐ 2. Method
- ☐ 3. Results (data, tables, figures)
- ☐ 4. Discussion (interpretation, limitations)

- ☐ 5. Conclusion
- ☐ References, Appendices

☐ **Consultancy-Style Report Template**

- ☐ Title page, executive summary
- ☐ 1. Introduction and objectives
- ☐ 2. Situation analysis / findings
- ☐ 3. Options evaluated
- ☐ 4. Recommendations (heavily weighted, numbered, prioritised)
- ☐ 5. Implementation considerations
- ☐ References, Appendices

☐ **Work Placement/Internship Report Template**

- ☐ Title page, executive summary
- ☐ 1. Introduction (organisation, role, objectives)
- ☐ 2. Description of placement activities
- ☐ 3. Reflection and evaluation (using a reflective framework)
- ☐ 4. Skills and learning outcomes
- ☐ 5. Conclusion and recommendations for future placements
- ☐ References, Appendices

☐ **Research Report Template**

- ☐ Title page, abstract, table of contents
- ☐ 1. Introduction and research question

- ☐ 2. Literature review
- ☐ 3. Methodology
- ☐ 4. Findings/Results
- ☐ 5. Discussion
- ☐ 6. Conclusion and recommendations for future research
- ☐ References, Appendices

Need feedback on your report before submission? Our UK academic tutors can review your structure, data presentation, analysis, and referencing to help you strengthen your work.

Practice Exercises

☐ Exercise 1 — The structure skeleton test

- ☐ Before drafting content, write out your full numbered heading structure
- ☐ Check it matches your required report type (business, lab, placement, etc.)
- ☐ Confirm every heading has a clear, specific purpose

☐ Exercise 2 — The standalone summary test

- ☐ Read only your executive summary
- ☐ Check whether it alone communicates your purpose, key findings, and recommendations

- ☐ Revise if it reads as an introduction rather than a genuine summary

☐ Exercise 3 — The visual reference audit

- ☐ List every table and figure in your report
- ☐ Check each one is captioned and explicitly referenced in your prose
- ☐ Add missing captions or in-text references where needed

☐ Exercise 4 — Recommendation traceability check

- ☐ List each recommendation
- ☐ For each, identify the specific finding or piece of evidence it addresses
- ☐ Revise any recommendation that doesn't clearly trace back to your analysis

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the basic structure of a UK university report? Front matter (title page, executive summary, table of contents), main body (introduction, findings, analysis, conclusion, recommendations), and end matter (references, appendices).

2. What's the difference between an executive summary and an introduction?

The executive summary stands alone as a complete overview of findings and recommendations; the introduction orients the reader into the body without summarising conclusions.

3. Should I write my executive summary first or last? Last — it needs to accurately reflect the entire finished report, which is only possible once everything else is complete.

4. How is a report different from an essay? Reports use numbered headings, standalone executive summaries, and data-driven findings; essays use continuous argumentative prose without this formal segmentation.

5. How long should my executive summary be? Typically 5–10% of the total report word count, though this varies — check your specific assignment brief.

6. Do all reports need the same sections? No — a lab report emphasises method and results, while a consultancy-style report emphasises recommendations. Structure should match your specific report type.

7. How should I present numerical data in a report? In clearly labelled, numbered tables or figures, each referenced explicitly in your prose (e.g. "as shown in Table 2...").

8. What goes in an appendix versus the main body? Supplementary detail (raw data, full survey results) belongs in appendices; content essential to following your core argument belongs in the main body.

9. How many recommendations should a report include? There's no fixed number, but each should be specific and clearly linked to a finding — prioritise quality and traceability over quantity.

10. Should recommendations be numbered? Yes, particularly where there are several — numbering makes them easier to reference and signals clear prioritisation.

11. What's the difference between findings and analysis/discussion? Findings present what you discovered; analysis/discussion interprets what it means, using relevant theory and evaluation.

12. How formal should the tone of a report be? Generally more concise and direct than an essay, though the exact register depends on your report type and discipline — check your module conventions.

13. Can I use first person in a report? Sometimes, particularly in reflective placement reports; more formal business and technical reports often favour a more impersonal register. Check your brief.

14. How do I reference sources in a report? Using your required referencing style consistently (Harvard, APA 7, etc.), with a complete reference list in the end matter.

15. What's the biggest mistake students make in reports? Writing in essay style — continuous prose without proper numbered structure or a genuine standalone executive summary.

16. Should my report include a table of contents? Yes, for most formal reports, particularly longer ones — list numbered sections and subsections with page numbers.

17. How do I choose what data to include in my findings section? Include data directly relevant to your report's purpose and central to the analysis that follows; move supplementary detail to appendices.

18. What's a consultancy-style report? A report format that heavily weights evaluated options and specific, actionable recommendations, often written as if addressing a specific client or stakeholder.

19. How do I write a strong report conclusion? Summarise your overall analytical judgement briefly, without introducing new findings, and connect clearly to the recommendations that follow.

20. Should conclusions and recommendations be combined or separate sections? Either can work — check your assignment brief, but ensure recommendations are clearly distinguishable as specific proposed actions either way.

21. How detailed should my methodology section be (for research/lab reports)? Detailed enough that another researcher could replicate your approach, without including excessive procedural detail better suited to an appendix.

22. What's the ideal length for a findings section? Typically 20–25% of your report's main body word count, though this varies by report type — lab and research reports often weight findings more heavily.

23. How do I avoid an overly long introduction? Keep it focused on background, purpose, scope, and structure signposting — save detailed findings and conclusions for their dedicated sections.

24. Can I use bullet points in a report? Yes, more so than in essays — bullet points work well for discrete findings, recommendation lists, and some background information, provided prose analysis remains the core of your discussion.

25. How do I format headings consistently? Use a consistent numbering system (1, 1.1, 1.2, 2...) throughout, matching your module's specific formatting requirements if provided.

26. Should I include a limitations section? Many reports benefit from briefly acknowledging limitations, particularly in research, lab, and dissertation-level reports, demonstrating critical awareness.

27. How do I handle a report that combines quantitative and qualitative findings? Present each using its most appropriate method — tables/charts for quantitative data, thematic summaries or quotations for qualitative findings — and analyse them together where relevant.

28. What's the most common feedback comment on student reports? "Reads like an essay" — almost always meaning the report lacks proper numbered structure and a genuine standalone executive summary.

29. How do I make my recommendations specific rather than generic? State what should happen, by whom, within what timeframe, and reference the specific finding or evidence supporting it.

30. Should I include a title page even for shorter reports? Generally yes, for formal reports — it should state the title, your details, module, word count, and submission date as required.

31. How do I check my report meets the required word count? Confirm exactly which sections count towards your word limit (executive summaries, references, and appendices are often excluded) before finalising.

32. What's the difference between a report and a dissertation? A dissertation is a much longer, more extensively researched document, though it often follows similar

structural principles (introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, conclusion).

33. How important is visual presentation to my overall mark? Often significant — many report marking criteria include a dedicated structure/presentation category assessed separately from content quality.

34. Can I reuse an essay I've already written and reformat it as a report? Generally not successfully — reports require different structural thinking (segmented navigation, data presentation, standalone summary) that essay content rarely translates into directly.

35. How do I decide which report template fits my assignment? Match your assignment brief's report type (business, lab, placement, research, consultancy) to the corresponding template structure, adjusting section emphasis as required.

36. How do report conventions differ between disciplines? Business reports emphasise recommendations for a specific stakeholder; technical and lab reports emphasise reproducible methodology; healthcare reports often blend data analysis with reflective elements.

37. What should I check in a final structural review pass? Confirm every expected section is present and correctly numbered, your table of contents page numbers are accurate, and every table or figure is captioned and referenced in the text.

38. How do I know if my data visualisations are effective? Check each one is simply designed, clearly labelled, consistent in style with your other visuals, and directly supports a specific point made in your prose.

39. Should I ask someone else to review my report before submission? Where possible, yes — asking a peer to identify your report's main recommendation from the executive summary alone is a quick, effective test of its clarity.

40. What are the four essential elements of a strong executive summary? Purpose (why the report exists), method (how it was investigated), key findings (what was discovered), and recommendations (what should happen next).

Key Takeaways

- A report is structurally different from an essay: numbered headings, a standalone executive summary, and data-driven findings replace continuous argumentative prose.
- Divide your report into front matter, main body, and end matter, each with standard component sections.
- Write your executive summary last, so it accurately reflects the entire finished document.
- Present findings in clearly labelled, captioned tables and figures, referenced explicitly in your prose.
- Analysis should interpret findings using relevant theory, not simply restate what the data shows.
- Recommendations should be specific, prioritised, and clearly traceable back to your findings.
- Word count and section proportions should match your specific report type and assignment brief.
- The fastest fix for a weak report is almost always the same: rebuild the numbered structure, and rewrite the executive summary to stand alone.

Conclusion

A strong report demonstrates a different set of skills from an essay: the ability to organise complex information into a navigable structure, present data clearly, and translate analysis into specific, actionable recommendations. Build your numbered heading structure before you draft your prose, present your findings with properly labelled visuals, and always write your executive summary last so it genuinely stands alone. The fastest way to strengthen a weak report is always the same: stop writing it like an essay, and start structuring it like the professional document format it's meant to be.

Need feedback on your report before submission? Our UK academic tutors can review your structure, data presentation, analysis, and referencing to help you strengthen your work before you submit.

This guide is provided for educational purposes to help UK university students structure and write their own reports independently. AssignPro Solution offers tutoring, feedback, proofreading and referencing guidance only, and does not write or complete assignments on behalf of students.