

# WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AND PROJECT REPORTS.

## Study Guide

### » INTRODUCTION

These tips and hints provide a brief summary of key points to consider when constructing assignment and project reports for the Chartered Management Institute qualifications.

This guide is offered as a general introduction to assignment and report construction only as the style of assignments is up to the Centre and the tutor and students should seek confirmation of the appropriate style.

In all written assignments consider the reader from the beginning. Your reader must find your report useful, and the facts presented in such a way that they can be absorbed easily and accurately. You cannot use suitable language, suitable layout or even select the material properly, unless you know to whom you are talking to and what is wanted from the report.

### » KEY ACTIONS

#### 1. Structure

It is more than useful to have a generally accepted structure or framework set of headings under which to construct the various elements of the assignment or project report. This structure or framework should be logical and allow the author to build a persuasive case to lead the reader(s) to a well-argued and concise set of Conclusions and Recommendations. It is also extremely helpful in planning the timetable for report investigation and construction. The following main headings are offered in Table 1 below, and each will be discussed in more detail later in this document.

- › Title page
- › Contents and appendices contents page
- › Acknowledgements page
- › Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations
- › Statement of Terms of Reference
- › Executive summary
- › Introduction and background
- › Main body of the investigation
- › Conclusions
- › Recommendations
- › Appendices
- › Bibliography

## 2. Writing styles

You are writing for the reader(s), not yourself. Always consider a style appropriate for the reader. Where a number of different readers are anticipated, it is suggested a more formal and general style is adopted as follows:

- › Do not write in the first person; the third person is less emotive and more persuasive.
- › Always check spelling, and do not rely solely on automatic spell-checkers.
- › Stay clear of clichés, jargon and statements in inverted commas, unless these are quotations which are attributed. Occupationally used jargon and terminology is acceptable providing it is either explained in the main text or is shown in the Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations.
- › Check your grammar; we all make errors, and it is advisable to ask a colleague to critically and constructively check your work before submission.
- › Number your pages consecutively in the bottom right hand corner and place your name and report title in the header section of each page. If required by your tutor, place your student number after your name.

## 3. Presentation

Assignments and reports should be typed. If a print copy is required, this should be bound in a secure cover with the Title Page being immediately evident as the cover page.

Ideally, typing should be either 10 or 11-point font, with a 1.5 line spacing to allow for effortless reading – this usually results in approximately 200 words for each side of A4 paper. Do not use an exotic font style; Arial or Verdana is very readable, although you may have a requisite house style within your own organisation.

If using the earlier suggested report structure at Table 1, ensure each main heading commences on a new page. Number each Appendix item consecutively as they are mentioned in the main text and, if possible, tab each individual Appendix for easy reader access.

## 4. Elements of a report

### **Title page**

This must show the title of the assignment or report, your name, your organisation or study centre, the date of compilation and the qualification for which the report is written.

### **Contents and appendices contents page**

This lists, in a tabular format, the headings of the report against the page number on which each section begins. It should also list the Appendices titles (below the table of main contents), with the relevant appendix number against each. Check that your table does correctly indicate the page and appendix numbers as they appear in the report – this is a common error. Word processing software often has an option to automatically generate a contents page.

### **Acknowledgements page**

An opportunity for the author to express appreciation for assistance given by individuals or organisations to the author in the investigation, construction and checking of the report. It is acceptable to indicate how individuals or organisations have assisted.

### **Glossary of terms and abbreviations**

Normally presented as a table and contains all those occupationally specific terms or abbreviations which the author has used in the written text. Each term or abbreviation is to be fully explained for the benefit of the

reader. Do not expect the reader to understand the same terms and abbreviations that you understand - assume they know none. Once the term or abbreviation has been shown in this section, it is acceptable to use the term or abbreviation in the remainder of the document without any further reference or explanation.

### **Statement of terms of reference**

This sets out, in clear and unambiguous terms, the purpose or objective of the report. This is what the report seeks to achieve or investigate. The reader will always, at the conclusion of reading the report, ask if the author has achieved his or her objective and use this as the benchmark to determine success. It may be useful to re-visit your Terms of Reference at the conclusion of the report as your investigations may have strayed from your original objective but, the objective or Terms of Reference could be modified to reflect this deviation.

### **Executive summary**

This is a brief (usually no more than two pages of A4) summary or précis of the key points of the whole report. It includes why you decided on this project topic, the key elements of the investigation and finally, your major Conclusions and Recommendations – effectively, a beginning, middle and end. Remember, this is only a précis and should briefly summarise the whole report; it allows readers to gain an overview of the full report, without having to read the whole document, and therefore should contain only your major and most persuasive arguments. You should be selective in choosing the material for this section.

### **Introduction and background**

Use this section to set the scene for the reader. Discuss, in detail, why you have chosen this topic and relate the known history or background to the situation; effectively, what has gone before in relation to the project about to be discussed.

### **Main body of the investigation**

This section or, more likely, sections, contains your investigative process, with a rationale for each process or situation investigated; it is by far the largest part of your report. It is normal to justify each area of investigation, indicate how the investigation was conducted (including information gathering and analysis) and how each is related to the objective or Terms of Reference of the report. It is usual to comment upon the usefulness, or otherwise, of the investigative material.

You will no doubt wish to quote the work of others, ensure you reference the quoted work accordingly and correctly use either the Harvard System or the British Standard (Numeric) System.

Tables and charts are acceptable in this section if these are directly relevant to the text; these should not be large and intrusive, nor distract the reader from your main text. If used in the main text, they should be consecutively annotated as either 'Diagram 1 (or A), 2 (or B), etc' or 'Table A (or 1), B (or 2), etc'. If your tables or charts are large and complex, they should be placed in the Appendix section and numbered accordingly.

### **Conclusions**

These must follow logically from the main body of the report, do not fall into the common error of including Conclusions that cannot be attributed to your investigation(s). Conclusions are deductions made from the investigation, they are not Recommendations.

The most significant Conclusions could be included in your Executive Summary.

### **Recommendations**

These are your recommendations made to achieve your objective(s) or Terms of Reference, and are a result of your Conclusions. Do ensure that your Recommendations are achievable, time bound, cost/benefit analysed and indicate the recommended responsibility for implementation.

Do not make recommendations that are not supported by your Conclusions.

It is normal to suggest priorities when suggesting a number of Recommendations, but always include a realistic cost/benefit analysis for each recommendation. You should present a strong case in terms of benefits for each recommendation.

The strongest and most persuasive recommendations could be included in your Executive Summary.

Remember, you are recommending a course or courses of action, to achieve your objective or Terms of Reference; check back to ensure a logical and correct relationship between the two.

## Appendices

This section contains the supporting material that is too complex or detailed to include in the main body of your text, but this must be referenced within your main body of text.

When referring to Appendix items in your main body text, ensure you refer to the items chronologically, that is, Appendix 1 will be mentioned first, followed by Appendix 2, etc.

## Bibliography

This is a listing of all the material referenced during the course of the investigation. It should be formatted to include the title of the material, author, publisher (if appropriate) and year of publication. Some material referenced may be in-house documentation, in which case the publisher will be the name of the organisation or department. See our guides to Referencing and Avoiding Plagiarism, as well as the Additional Resources below.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### BOOKS

**How to cite, reference and avoid plagiarism at university**, Kathleen McMillan and Jonathan Weyers  
Harlow: Pearson Education, 2013  
This book is available as an [e-book](#).

**The study skills handbook**, 4th ed, Stella Cottrell  
Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013

**The business skills handbook**, Roy Horn  
Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development: London, 2009

**Study skills for part time students**, Dorothy Bedford  
Harlow: Pearson Education, 2009  
This book is available as an [e-book](#).

**Brilliant writing tips for students**, Julia Copus  
London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009

This is a selection of books available for loan to members from CMI's Management Library. More information at: [www.managers.org.uk/library](http://www.managers.org.uk/library)



## MORE INFORMATION

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