

Faculty of Computing & Digital Communication

HND in Computing (2003)

Module: Tutorial

GUIDELINES FOR REPORT WRITING

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Summary

This document attempts to provide guidelines to the accepted standard for Report Writing for students of the City of Bristol College attending a HNC/D Award in Computing. It covers all aspects of typical report including content, layout, style and most importantly the methods that **must** be used for referencing material written or produced by others.

The summary should not contain any information that has not been discussed in the report.

This document has been adapted from '*Guidelines to writing laboratory reports*'¹ and '*Guidelines for Report Writing*'².

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document is designed to provide you the student with some easy to follow guidelines for writing the reports required in assignments whilst undertaking your HNC / D in Computing with the City of Bristol College.

The standards and requirements set out in this document reflect those agreed by the teaching team in the Faculty of Computing and Digital Communication, these standards may change at different institutions or organisations. One of the most important standards set in this document is that for referencing citations within your work (see section 2.9). It is also intended to give suggestions on report format of scientific and technical reports. The final section discusses plagiarism.

When submitting reports for assessment, you must adhere to all the standards set in this document.

2. FORMAT

The ordering of a report depends on its contents. One rule is important, that the contents must be logically organised. The following gives the typical layout and style of a general technical report. Some of the headings may not be appropriate to all reports. For writing Software Reports see the handout 'Writing a Software Report'.

2.1 Title Page

The title page should contain the following:.

Faculty Of: Computing & Digital Communication
Course Name & Year
Module Name
Report Title
Name Of Author(s)
Date

Most of this information will normally be on the assignment front sheet.

2.2 Summary

This is a very brief statement of the whole report. You should summarise the work under its different headings, the results obtained, conclusions and recommendations, if any. A summary is normally less than 100 words, although in a long report the summary would be a page or a chapter on its own.

This may be the only part of the report to be read, so it should give a quick "feel" for the contents. A summary is usually written last.

2.3 Contents List

Again prepared after the rest of the report, this is a numbered list of sections and appendices, telling the reader the structure of the report, and where to find what, at a glance. Pages must be numbered.

2.4 Introduction

This section sets the scene, stating terms of reference, context of work (description of the problem, reasons for the work to be undertaken). It should include, possibly as a side heading, a statement of objectives. It may well be a copy of your task objectives.

2.5 Main Text e.g. Strategy/Experimental Procedure / Methodology / Equipment / Instrumentation

This may be many sections. Chose an appropriate title or titles, depending upon the nature of you report.

If it is a lab report, explain your strategy for achieving the objectives, describe any equipment used or made, the instrumentation and how you made the measurements, the methods used for recording, or any other procedures followed. This section should enable the reader to repeat the work, but need not be a laboured account.

2.6 Results And Discussion

Long lists of results (especially instrumentation readings) should be given in an appendix. This section will contain calculations arising from the readings, together with any formulae. The results should be given as tables, graphs or diagrams, as appropriate (see 3.3 below). Discuss your results as you present them, and comment on their accuracy. Don't ask readers to make their own interpretation of your arguments - make them clear, and justify your conclusions.

2.7 Conclusion(s)

The main points of your report, as they relate to your objectives, should be clearly re-stated here. This should be done as a list of numbered points, or as a series of paragraphs. There should be no new information.

2.8 Recommendations

If you were asked to make recommendations, or chose one of a number of options, for example, you should do so in a clearly labelled section, giving your reasons.

2.9 References

"Referencing is not something which should be lightly undertaken. Accuracy is essential".³

There is often confusion over the difference between References and Bibliography.

References: all the texts/material you have actually referred to in your report. Any background reading, if it is not referred to in the course of the report, is excluded from this list.

Bibliography: all the texts/material you have read in preparation for your report are listed here. Some of this material you may not have referred to directly in your report, but reading it may have helped you decide on your argument.

When quoting from another work, the quotation must be accurate, and the source of quotation must be given. Use “.....” marks, and a numbering system. In the References List at the end of the report, give the AUTHOR (in caps); *title (in italics)*, place of publication: publisher, year and page number for a book, or author, title, journal name, volume, date and page number for a periodical.

If you have copied a figure or table, show its source, for example the growth of Object Oriented Computing has grown over eight years as shown by the graph below.

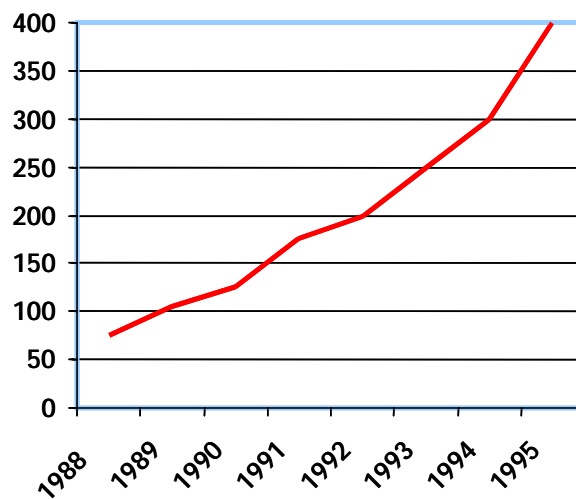


Figure 1: Growth of Object Oriented Computing over 8 Years (Source: Blair et al⁴)

Use of Internet resources must also be referenced showing the name of the article, the URL and date accessed. One way of explaining the internal combustion engine might be to liken it to a potato cannon as explained on the How Stuff Works⁵ web site. The article itself should be included as an appendix ONLY if it is important as further reference. Generally web site material should not be included in a report.

2.10 Bibliography

This section lists, in alphabetical order, the literature you have used when compiling the report, but not in a specific way. Simple reports, such as those for activities, assignments, or general course work, will always contain a bibliography, to show what background reading you have done.

2.11 Appendix Or Appendices

Separate appendices should be used for the following:

- lengthy data;
- sample calculations;
- lengthy descriptions of equipment;
- any other information that would interrupt the flow of the main report.

Information that is referred to more than once should also be placed in an appendix.

3. STYLE

Reports are often a group effort, but every attempt must be made to them as homogeneous as possible, by using a consistent style. It is essential that the report is put together and thoroughly checked for this before it is handed in.

3.1 Word Processing

Reports will normally be word processed, and printed on a single printer. This helps give it uniformity of style. Remember that documents written using different systems can be brought together using ASCII (Generic) codes.

- 3.1.1 Reports should be produced using font labelled 'Times' or 'Times New Roman' at a font size of 12 pt.
- 3.1.2 All reports should be in single line spacing unless otherwise specified.
- 3.1.3 Only one side of the paper should be written on.
- 3.1.4 Justify your work for neatness of appearance. Margins at both sides should be about 2.5cm wide.
- 3.1.5 Long quotations should be indented at both sides.
- 3.1.6 There is no need to indent at the beginning of a new paragraph. Notice how the paragraphs above are made distinctive by extra-line spacing.

3.2 Headings

Headings enable the reader to decide whether to skip, skim or read in depth a particular section. They should be uniform in style, using CAPITAL LETTERS and/or **bold type**. Be consistent.

Formal reports benefit from a numbering system as illustrated in this document. Discussion of the report is easier, with easy reference to particular paragraphs.

3.3 Tables And Figures

Each should be given a number and a title, and must be referred to in the text. Keep a separate numbering system for tables and for figures. A good illustration is well labelled, self-explanatory and needs no further explanation in words. Place an illustration on the same page as the relevant text, or on the facing page if it is large.

3.4 English

A report should be grammatically correct, using correct spelling and easy to read. Proof read it, use a dictionary or spellchecker, and remember the following rules:

- 3.4.1 avoid words of three or more syllables.
- 3.4.2 explain technical terms, unless you are sure that they will be understood.
- 3.4.3 avoid long sentences - the average sentence should be of between 18-20 words. It should also have a subject and a verb.
- 3.4.4 start a new paragraph when introducing a new idea.
- 3.4.5 avoid using personal pronouns (I, we) etc., but don't be pompous!
- 3.4.6 avoid colloquialism (things you might say but are not correct grammar or English)

4. Plagiarism

Academic dishonesty may be defined as any attempt by a student to gain an unfair advantage in any assessment by deception or fraudulent means.

Plagiarism is defined as passing off someone else's work as your own. The keyword here is "work". That could extend from photographs or other graphics, musical compositions, documents that are published or unpublished, to a person's basic idea for a piece of work ⁶.

Plagiarism includes:

- Copying directly from a text, word-for-word;
- Using an attractive phrase or sentence you have found somewhere;
- Using text downloaded from the Internet;
- Paraphrasing the words of a text very closely;
- Borrowing statistics from another source or person;
- Copying from the essays or the notes of another student;
- Downloading or copying pictures, photographs, or diagrams without acknowledging your sources⁷.

The college regard this as a serious offence and will severely penalise any student who is believed to have committed it. Their assignment or submitted work will be marked at zero.

Plagiarism is identified in a number of ways, not least when a student's written vocabulary suddenly surpasses the student's oral vocabulary, there is cause for suspicion. The reverse is also true.

DON'T DO IT!

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