



Guide to Reader Friendly Writing

1:3:25 Report

The report format is as follows:

- 1: Start with one page of Main Messages
- 3: Follow with a three page Executive Summary
- 25: Present your findings in no more than 25 pages of writing, in language a bright, educated, but **not research trained person would understand**.

Writing a research report for decision makers is not the same as writing an article for an academic journal. It has a different objective, and it takes a different approach.

Main Messages

The 'one' in the 1:3:25 format is one page of main message bullets. They are the heart of your report, the lessons decision makers can take from your research. Don't confuse them with a summary of findings: you have to go one step further and tell your audience what you think the findings mean for them. This is your chance, based on your research, to tell decision makers what implications your work has for theirs.

How to formulate them? Focus on expressing clear conclusions based on what you've learned. Consider your audience – who are they and what do they most need to know about what you've learned? What does this really mean for your audience? Spell it out. Writing main messages can be difficult, as it is a judgment about how to best use the findings. If you don't do it you're leaving your work to be interpreted by someone else, who won't likely have your insight.

This is not to say that you have to come up with definitive recommendations from research that just doesn't offer them. Be as concrete as you can and then, if you're really not ready to draw more conclusions, **don't** just fall back on "more research is needed".

Executive Summary

The 'three' in 1:3:25 is the executive summary. These are your findings condensed to serve the needs of the decision maker, who wants to know quickly whether the report will be useful.

An executive summary is **not an academic abstract**; it's much more like a newspaper story, where the most interesting information goes at the top, followed by the background and context and less important information further down. This is not the place for more than a paragraph or two about your approach, methods and other technical details. Concentrate on getting the essence of your research across succinctly but not cryptically.

The Report

Twenty-five pages is allotted for the completed report of your work (give or take depending on the size of the study and what needs to be provided in the report). This may be a length you're more comfortable with, but don't lapse into academic style just because you have more room. Feel free to use a variety of infographics, anecdotes or stories to get your point across. Make sure your writing suits the decision maker (intelligent and interested, but not an academic). What would they find most useful and interesting?

As a guide, there are seven categories that can be covered in the report.

Context

Outline the policy issue or problem your research addresses. State the research question/s clearly. Highlight earlier research and the contribution the current research may make.

Implications

State what your findings mean for decision makers. Note what different types of audiences may be interested in your work, and if the research has different messages for those different audiences, separate and label them. Notes on how broadly the information can be generalised should go here. This is where the essence of your key messages is found.

Approach

Outline your methods, including the design of the study, the sources of data and details on the sample, the response rate and analysis techniques. Describe how you worked with decision makers or consumers/carers on the project, and outline your plans for dissemination. Highly technical material can be an appendix.

Results

Summarise your results to show how they support the conclusions you have presented, highlighting themes and messages. Use graphs and tables if they will improve understanding. Results that don't relate directly to the conclusions should be moved to an appendix.

Additional resources

This is the place to give information on publications, websites and other useful sources of information for decision makers. Not for other researchers – although they may find it useful.

Further research

Outline gaps in knowledge; frame questions on policy issues you've identified and suggest studies to answer them.

References and bibliography

References in the report should use consecutive superscript numbering and be presented as endnotes, not in the body of the text or the foot of the page.