

# REPORT WRITING AND GRAMMATICAL PITFALLS

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Methods and Materials - Findings - Conclusions - Recommendations  
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Typeface - A or An - Abbreviations - Acronyms - Americanisms - Among or  
Amongst Ampersands - Among or Amongst - Apostrophes - Brackets  
Collective Nouns (singular) Colon or Semicolon - Commas - Continually or  
Continuously - Contractions - Double Negatives - Due to or Owing to. - Ellipses  
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Nouns - Quotation Marks - Sentence Length. - Shall or Will Split Infinitives  
Tautologies - That or Which - Who or Whom

# REPORT WRITING AND GRAMMATICAL PITFALLS

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This is a general outline on report-writing.

The purpose of a report is to inform the reader. It is important, therefore, that essential information is included and that it is treated in a logical way. The standard components of a report are as follows:

Title . Summary or Abstract . List of Contents . Introduction . Main body of the report . Conclusions . Recommendations . Appendices . References.

Plan the report carefully, using the appropriate section headings. Follow the guidelines. Write with your readership in mind, and as concisely and as clearly as possible.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/skills/writing/article/art20130702112133612>

<http://englishlanguagetips.com>

## The Logo

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Always put the organisation's logo at the top of the page and the CIO number and address at the bottom (or wherever you think it is suitable).

## The Title

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The title should be brief.

## The Summary

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A brief overview of the report.

## Contents

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Guides the reader to specific information quickly.

## Introduction

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Sets the scene for the reader so that they know what to expect, and should cover:

- Why is the report being written:

Sets out a brief for the report – the circumstances which made the report necessary and what is hoped to be achieved by writing it. Give some background information, so that there is a framework into which readers can fit the information being presented.

- What kind of information does it contain?

Give an indication of the subject matter, which is being dealt with – how detailed, or technical the information is going to be, and how is the problem being approached?

- For whom is the report being written:

State whether you are writing for a technical or general reader – or any other particular group.

## Main Body of the Report

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This is where the real content of the report is presented. It should be given its own title which describes the subject matter.

## Methods and Materials

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What has been done, how it was done and what has been done with it.

## Findings

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Present the evidence. It should be organised so that conclusions arise naturally from the facts written. Tables and graphs are best placed in an Appendix and ensure that these are well constructed and labelled so that they make the information easier to understand.

## The Conclusions

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These should arise naturally from the evidence that is presented in the previous sections. Do not include any new information that does not appear in the main body of the report, and do not make statements that cannot be supported.

## The Recommendations

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Not always necessary, but if they are included, they should follow on logically from the conclusions.

## The Appendix

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Contains peripheral matter which would overload your main argument

## Glossary

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If presenting a technical report to people who are not experts in the subject, it is sometimes helpful to provide explanations of the technical terms used. List them alphabetically.

## Tables

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When presenting a large amount of statistical data, it is more convenient to collect it together in an Appendix. Give informative titles to the tables to ensure that they are presented in the order in which they are referred to in the text.

## Diagrams and illustrations

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Present diagrams and illustrations within the main body of the report.

## References

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If you have consulted other sources (eg books, journals, videos), to help to compile the report, then you **MUST** give a list of your references. List them in alphabetically in order of author's surname in a Bibliography at the end.

## Style

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Style is a matter of good manners – put yourself in your readers' place, so that you do not make unnecessary demands on them. Readers should not have to struggle to understand the meaning of what is written.

## Be brief and be clear ...

Use no more words than are necessary to express what you mean.

Use words that have the precise meaning you intend to convey, and when you have the choice, choose words which are most easily understood. Avoid words with vague meanings. Avoid ambiguities - and do not invent words.

## Grammatical Pitfalls – Alphabetical

### TYPEFACE

Ideally, use a Sans Serif font. This is helpful and necessary for those with sight impairments. The size of the font should be a minimum of 12 pitch. Beware of choice of font – for instance, Segoe and others may not transport from a Mac to MS Office, or vice versa.

### 'A' OR 'AN'

'A' for words that have a consonant sound. This also applies to words commencing with the long 'u' sound like 'eu' and 'uni'.	"AN" for words beginning with a vowel – including words with a silent 'h'. There are only four words starting with a silent 'h' – hour, honour, heir and honest.
Words commencing with 'eu'	European . Eulogy . Eucalyptus . Eureka
Words commencing with 'u'	Union . University . Unit . Unique . Use

### ABBREVIATIONS ... These are generally acceptable ...

Dr	Doctor
USA	United States of America

**ACRONYMS ...** The first initial of titles that can then be pronounced like a word

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
ASAP	As soon as possible
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

The first time an Acronym and Initialisation is used in a report, ALWAYS use the full name and place the acronym/initialisation in brackets next to it. The acronym/initialisation can be used thereafter in the report. Never assume that the reader knows what these refer to.

**AMERICANISMS ...** Do not use them!

Trucker (US) = Lorry driver (UK)	Trash can (US) = Dustbin (UK)
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**AMONG or AMONGST**

There is virtually no difference between the two. 'Among' is the most used in English.

**AMPERSANDS (&) ...** Never use this in a report.

Ampersands should only ever be used in 'registered' company names – for instance: M&S and Johnson & Johnson.

The ampersand was once part of the English alphabet, but was dropped as 'modern English' evolved.

**APOSTROPHES ...** Indicates either possession or omission

Possession:	The Queen's relatives	The baby's clothes
Omission:	It's a windy day	That's fine!
Exception:	Dates: 1960s	

**BRACKETS (Parentheses) ... There are two types**

Round brackets ( )	Used to separate non-essential information	When it snows (and it will), we can see the real beauty of the mountain.
Square brackets [ ]	Used to enclose words added by someone other than the original writer or speaker.	The witness said, 'Gary [Thompson] was not usually late for work'.

**COLLECTIVE NOUNS – (Singular) ... Beware of 'singular collective nouns'**

Kingston Voluntary Action is a <u>singular</u> collective noun – see other examples below. The verb to follow a singular collective noun is also singular	
Kingston Voluntary Action <b>IS</b> pleased to announce ...	<b>NOT:</b> Kingston Voluntary Action are pleased to announce ...
Army . Council . Organisations . Committee . Team . School . Jury Audience	

**COLON and SEMI-COLON**

Colon :	Use a colon in a list, a summary or a long quotation. A colon is used to provide a pause before introducing related information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In two words: I'm tired.</li> <li>• The list included: apples and beer, for instance.</li> </ul>
Semi-Colon ;	Used to break up a very long list. A semi-colon is stronger than a comma, but not as final as a full stop.	The shopping list included apples; beans; bananas; potatoes; crisps and beer.

COMMAS ... There are four types of commas

The Listing Comma	Used when three or more words, phrases or sentences are joined by the word 'and' or 'or'.	You can fly to Dubai via Amsterdam, Rome or Cairo.
The Joining Comma	Used to join two complete sentences into a single sentence. The connecting words are: 'and', 'or', 'but', 'while' and 'yet'	You must hand in your essay by Friday, or you will receive a mark of zero.
The Gapping Comma	Used to show that one or more words have been left out.	Italy is famous for its composers and musicians, France for its chefs and philosophers, and Poland for its mathematicians and logicians.
Bracketing Commas	A pair of bracketing commas is used to mark off a weak interruption of the sentence.	Darwin's Origin of Species', published in 1859, revolutionised biological thinking.

CONTINUALLY or CONTINUOUSLY

Continually	Very often	The website is being updated continually.
Continuously	Ceaselessly	The baby shrieks continuously the entire time I held her.

CONTRACTIONS ... Do NOT use these in any reports!

Use 'do not' instead of 'don't'.	Use 'cannot' instead of 'can't'.
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DOUBLE NEGATIVES ... Never use – these are poor grammar, but they can be found in song lyrics!

I can't find the car nowhere.	You can't see no-one today.
There ain't no mountain high enough.	I can't get no satisfaction.



## DUE TO and OWING TO

Due to	Caused by ... cause + result	His absence was due to illness.
Owing to	Because of. As a consequence of something ... owing to + cause	Owing to illness, he missed his exams.

'Due to' is more common than 'owing to' in modern English.

ELLIPSES (plural: ellipses) ... a punctuation mark consisting of three dots – never more, never less. Also known as dot-dot-dot.

Use an ellipsis to show an omission of a word, or words, in a quote.	
“After work I went shopping, at M&S in Kingston, and then went home.”	After work, I went shopping ... and then I went home.”
Use an ellipsis to show a pause in thought, or to create suspense.	
“I was thinking ... maybe we should go on holiday.”	
Use an ellipsis to show a break, or a trailing off, of a thought process.	
“I know I saw my keys somewhere ...”	

EXCLAMATION MARKS ... These should not be used in formal or business writing

Words or phrases used to express emotion or to catch a reader's attention. Only ever use ONE exclamation mark – no matter what!

What a stunning view!	Help!	Shut up!	How well Ireland played at Twickenham today!
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FEWER or LESS

FEWER is when you can count something – for instance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The family needs to have fewer holidays’.</li> </ul>	LESS if you cannot count it – for instance: ages, heights and weights. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>He was less than 5ft tall.</li> </ul>
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INITIALISATIONS ... The first initials of titles and then do not sound like words

FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
KVA	Kingston Voluntary Action

HYPHENS ... Used when two individual words are joined together. Also used to separate repeated letters in a compound word

Individual words joined	Check-up	Break-in
Compound words	Co-op	Re-emergence
Exception to the rule	Withhold	

IE or EG ... These do not mean the same thing ... and never use an initial capital

ie:	id est	In other words.	It happened in August, ie: two months ago.
eg:	exempli gratia	For example.	He was good at running, eg: rugby and football.

IF — WAS or WERE

‘If’ is a conditional clause, so use ‘were’ NOT ‘was’ – even if the pronoun is singular.

If I were you	If you were me
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NONE WERE or NONE WAS ...

Plural = not any	Singular = not a single one
One of the cakes was eaten	None of the children were hungry

NUMBERS ... Always write numbers in full at the start of a sentence

Twenty-nine robbers came a-knocking at the door	The door was opened to find 29 robbers outside.
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PROPER NOUNS / NOUNS ... Name of a person, place or organisation, times or dates in a calendar

Always use capitals for the initial letters.

Animals	Donald Duck	Lassie
Organisations	Kingston Voluntary Action	The United Nations
People	Queen Elizabeth	Sir Winston Churchill
Things	Financial Times newspaper	The Eiffel Tower
Times and Dates	Saturday	31 August 1982
Titles	Chief Executive	Trustee Board

PUNCTUATION ... Eases the flow for the reader ...

If in doubt about where to place a comma or a full stop, read the sentence/paragraph aloud and whenever you breathe, think about putting in the requisite punctuation.

QUOTATION MARKS ... Double or single ...

Double	Used to set off a direct quotation. Always capitalise the first word in a quotation.	"I hope that you will be there", he said.
Single	Used in specialist writing with meanings that are unique to that subject.	The inner margins of a book are called the 'gutter'.

SENTENCES ... Keep them brief ...

Sentences should never be longer than 13 - 15 words. Anything longer can lead to ambiguities and will certainly lose the reader's interest.

SHALL or WILL

Shall	First person pronouns - I and we	I shall be late
Will	Second and third person pronouns - you, he, she, it, they	They will not have enough food.

However, when it comes to expressing a strong determination to do something, the roles are reversed: 'Will' is used for the first person and 'Shall' with the second and third person.

I will not tolerate such behaviour	You shall go to the ball.
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SPLIT INFINITIVES ... Not recommended, but can make the meaning more powerful ...

'To boldly go' = split infinitive	'To go boldly' = non-split infinitive
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TAUTOLOGIES ... Try to avoid these - they are obvious statements ...

Past history.	I went there personally.	The evening sunset was beautiful.
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THAT or WHICH

That	Used with phrases that are 'essential' to the sentence – a part of a sentence that cannot be left out. 'That' defines something.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The umbrella that you lent me is in my car</li> <li>• The house that I wanted to buy has been sold</li> </ul>
Which	Used with phrases that are 'not essential' to the overall meaning of the sentence – therefore, can be omitted. 'Which' informs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The umbrella, which is brown, is in my car.</li> <li>• The house, which I didn't want to buy has been sold.</li> </ul>

WHO or WHOM ... Whom can be omitted in 'informal' writing, but it should be used  
In 'formal' writing – for instance, in reports

Who	The subject of the verb – the one doing the action.	Who's there? Who will be singing at the concert?
Whom	The object of the verb – the one being acted upon.	At the Trustees' Meeting, we shall announce whom we have selected as Treasurer.