



U3Ch4. Understanding the structure of reports

PAPER 01 — Communicative Skills

Unit 3 · Written Communication

Chapter 4 · Understanding the Structure of Reports

(Title · Summary · Introduction · Findings · Recommendations)

1 Why a Fixed Structure Matters

A formal report is a decision-making tool. Its **structure turns raw data into insight and insight into action**. A predictable sequence—Title → Summary → Introduction → Findings → Recommendations—lets busy readers:

1. **Locate information instantly** (skimmability).
2. **Assess credibility** (method and evidence appear before opinions).
3. **Compare multiple reports easily** (standard headings).
4. **Act quickly** (clear recommendations anchored in evidence).

Think of a report as a courtroom case: Title = case file, Summary = verdict preview, Introduction = opening statement, Findings = evidence, Recommendations = sentence/proposed remedy.

2 Title (and Title Page) — Your First Impression

Element	Purpose	Best-Practice Tips	Example
Clear Topic	Signal exactly what the report covers	Include key variable(s), timeframe, and organisation	"Q2 2025 Customer Satisfaction Analysis — Southern Region"
Concise Length	Aid citation, storage, memory	10–15 words; avoid jargon	"Feasibility Study for Solar Rooftop Project, Jaipur Plant"
Metadata	Enable version control and accountability	Date, author, department, confidentiality label	Confidential — Prepared for Board Review · 21 Jul 2025

Design notes:

- Use 16–18 pt bold, centred.
- Add company logo (top-left) and document ID (bottom-right) for large organisations.
- If distributed externally, include contact info (email, phone).

3 Executive Summary (or Abstract) — The 60-Second Snapshot

Aspect	Guidance
Length	≤ 10 % of total word count <i>or</i> 1 page max for reports up to 40 pp
Audience	Senior decision-makers who may read nothing else
Content Checklist (PRIME)	Purpose (why report exists) · Range (scope) · I mportant Findings (headline data) · M ajor Conclusions · E ssential Recommendations
Tone	Neutral, factual—avoid “we believe”; use past tense for findings, present for recommendations



Aspect	Guidance
Common Pitfall	Copy-pasting intro instead of writing a standalone mini-report

Micro-template (≈ 150-200 words)

Purpose: "This report analyses ..."

Range: "Data from Jan-Jun 2025 across 4 plants ..."

Findings: "Defect rate fell 12 %, exceeding target by 2 points."

Conclusions: "Automation in line 3 drove majority of gains."

Recommendations: "Extend automation to lines 1, 2 by Q4; invest ₹1.2 cr with projected 14-month payback."

4 Introduction — Orienting the Reader

Sub-Section	Key Questions Answered	Notes
Background / Context	What situation led to this report?	Brief history, previous studies, regulatory triggers
Objectives / Purpose	What does the report intend to achieve?	Use bullet list for multi-objective studies
Scope & Limitations	What's included, excluded, or constrained?	Clarify time period, geography, data gaps
Methodology Overview	How was information gathered and analysed?	Tools, data sources, sampling; full details can move to appendix

Writing Tips

1. **Start broad → narrow** ("Global demand for lithium has risen ... therefore this plant ...").
2. Use **present tense** for permanent context, **past tense** for completed research steps.
3. Limit to **1-2 pages** unless a complex technical study.

5 Findings (Discussion / Analysis) — The Evidence Engine

5.1 Organisation Strategies

Strategy	When to Use	Example Heading Set
Chronological	Time-series studies, project retrospectives	"4.1 Pre-Implementation Metrics" → "4.2 Post-Implementation Metrics"
Thematic / Topical	Market research, HR climate survey	"4.1 Employee Engagement" → "4.2 Career Development"
Comparative	A/B tests, benchmark reports	"4.1 System A Performance" vs. "4.2 System B Performance"
Geographical	Multi-site or regional analyses	"4.1 North Zone" → "4.2 South Zone"

5.2 Design Elements

Element	Purpose	Best Practice
Sub-Headings (H2/H3)	Break down complex findings	One idea per sub-heading; parallel grammar
Charts & Tables	Visualise trends, relationships	Label clearly; cite source; interpret in text ("Figure 2 shows ...")
Call-out Boxes	Highlight critical stats or quotes	Use shaded box; <40 words
Cross-References	Link to appendices or prior sections	"See Appendix B for raw survey data."



5.3 Commentary vs. Raw Data

- **Data first, interpretation immediately after:** present figure, then explain what it means.
- Use **neutral language** (“increased by 8 %”) rather than judgmental (“shot up”).
- Flag limitations honestly (“Sample size in Q4 was 20 % smaller due to sensor outage.”).

6 Recommendations — Converting Insight into Action

Component	Description	Example
Specific Action	Start with an imperative verb	“Upgrade conveyor motors in lines 1–3.”
Justification	Link back to findings (evidence)	“Will reduce downtime by estimated 11 % (Finding 4.2).”
Benefits / Impact	Quantify gains where possible	“ROI expected within 14 months; NPV ₹37 lakh.”
Owner & Timeline	Accountability drives execution	“Maintenance Dept.; complete by 30 Nov 2025.”
Priority Ranking	Helps allocate limited resources	High / Medium / Low or numeric ranking

Formatting Tips

- Use **numbered list** for clarity.
- If more than five recommendations, group by theme (e.g., *Technology · Process · People*).
- Optionally include **“Cost vs. Impact” matrix** graphic for quick executive scan.

7 Connecting the Sections — Flow & Cross-Checks

Checkpoint	What to Verify
Title → Summary	Does the summary mirror the key promise of the title?
Summary → Introduction	Does the introduction expand (not repeat) the summary?
Introduction → Findings	Do findings address each stated objective?
Findings → Recommendations	Is every recommendation traceable to at least one finding?
Recommendations → Title	Do proposed actions align with the overarching topic?

A mismatch at any checkpoint signals missing data, scope creep, or unsupported opinions.

8 Common Pitfalls & Quick Fixes

Pitfall	Symptom	Fix
“Data Dump” Findings	Long tables with no narrative	Insert interpretation paragraphs; highlight key numbers
Bloated Summary	Reads like first three pages of report	Rewrite using PRIME checklist; keep <1 page
Intro Overload	History lesson spanning 4 pages	Move background detail to appendix; keep intro lean
Recommendation Vagueness	“Improve training”	Specify who, what metric, deadline
Title Ambiguity	“Operations Report”	Add scope and period: “Operations Efficiency Report — Jan-Jun 2025”

9 Quick-Reference Template (4 pp Example)

Page	Heading	Word Guide
1	Title Page + Executive Summary	300 words
2	1. Introduction	400 words
2-3	2. Findings	800 words + 2 charts
4	3. Recommendations	300 words + cost-impact table

Use this for short managerial reports; scale section lengths proportionally for larger studies.

10 Self-Practice Corner

- Reverse-Outline Drill**
 - Take an existing report. Strip away headings. Write the five-section skeleton. Does every part exist and flow?
- Summary Sprint**
 - Summarise a 10-page article into a 200-word executive summary using PRIME. Peer-review for completeness.
- Findings Makeover**
 - Transform a raw data table into a findings subsection with a chart and commentary.
- Recommendation Builder**
 - For each finding in practice #3, craft one SMART recommendation (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).
- Checkpoint Audit**
 - Use the flow checklist (Section 7) on your next report draft; log any misalignments and revise.

Chapter Takeaways

- Title** frames scope and ownership; keep it precise.
- Executive Summary** delivers the entire story in miniature—perfect for skimmers and executives.
- Introduction** provides context, objectives, and methods so readers trust the evidence.
- Findings** present data plus interpretation through clear headings, visuals, and neutral language.
- Recommendations** translate evidence into actionable, prioritised steps tied to benefits and owners.

Master this five-part structure, and every report you craft will guide readers smoothly from question to confidence—and from confidence to action.