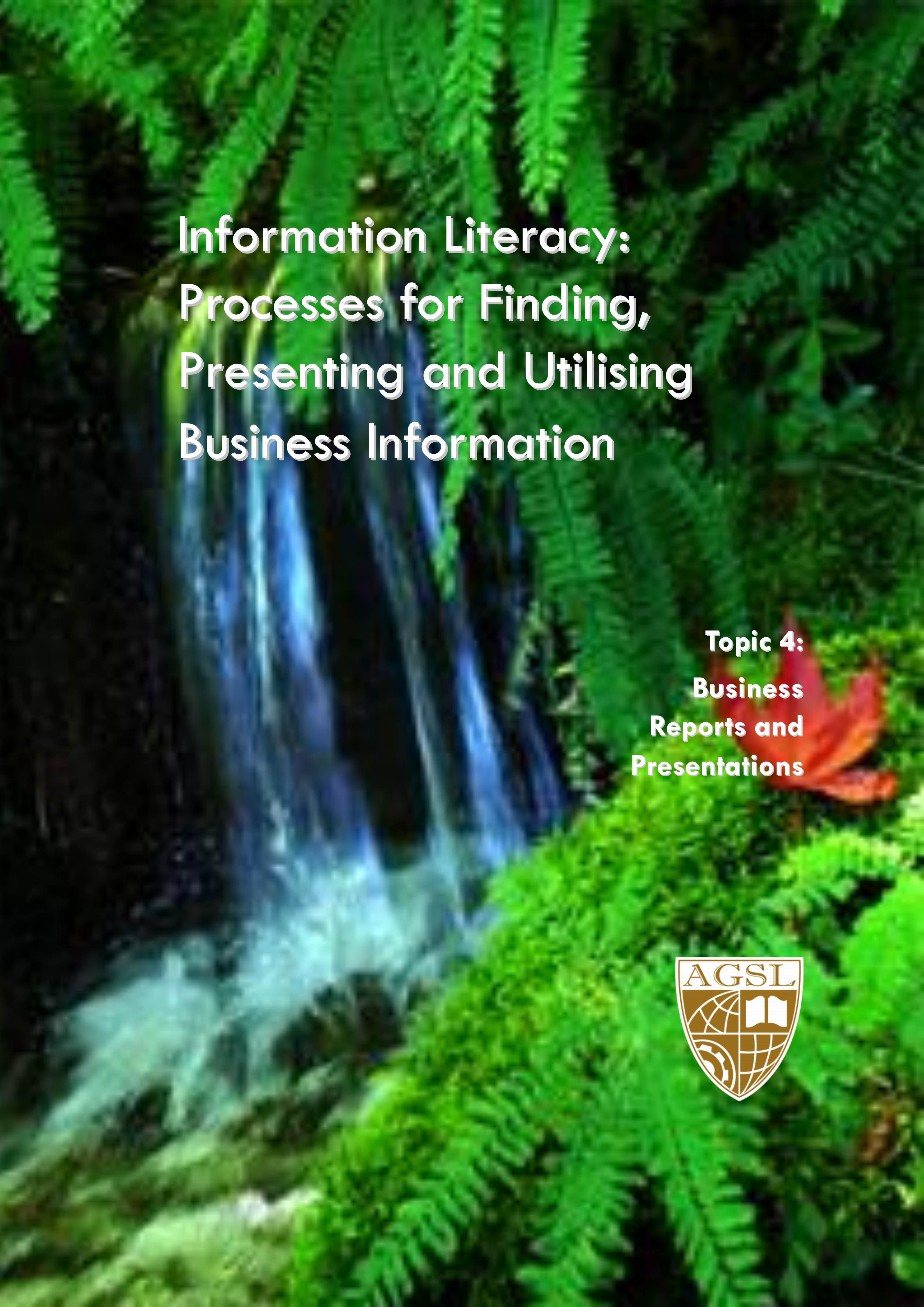

Information Literacy: Processes for Finding, Presenting and Utilising Business Information

Topic 4: Business Reports and Presentations

AGSL

Copyright

Information Literacy: Processes for Finding, Presenting and Utilising Business Information

Topic 4: Business Reports and Presentations

Introduction

This topic describes how to write a business report and provides some tips for presentations.

Given that the business report is the culmination of the business research you have undertaken, it is important to get it right in order to convey to the reader and/or decision maker the thoroughness, reliability, and validity of your work.

Generic components of a business report and a description of their contents are given to guide you in creating the best possible report. In some contexts, other components will need to be added or some components will need to be merged or deleted, but the structure provided here should give you a solid foundation to work from.

Why business reports are written

Business reports documents have at least three distinctly different objectives:

1. To secure a decision to proceed with a specified initiative (business cases)
2. To continue to the next milestone given an existing initiative (performance review)
3. To brief decision makers as part of their decision process (situation analysis).

The objective therefore, of a business report, should have a significant impact on the content of that report that is, the facts presented within the report. If the report involves recommendations as is necessary in regard to business case reports, how these recommendations are made compelling depends on how the reader of the report is likely to perceive the logic of the situation. This implies that the targeted report recipients need to be viewed as interrelated stakeholders who may share relevant perceptions or who may have conflicting relevant perceptions. This suggests that for many business report situations, report writer(s) will need to make crucial trade-offs based on their understanding of how the recipients of the report and all those likely to be impacted by that report are likely to view the report.

In regard to major initiatives, the ability to understand how the network of relevant interrelationships between such stakeholders is likely to determine their response to the report becomes a key to writing a successful business report.

In developing a strategy for producing a business report, it is therefore essential to:

1. Determine what purpose the report is seeking to achieve amongst which stakeholders. Whatever the purpose and whoever the stakeholders may be, in the last decade to an increasing extent, the prime requirement of any business report must be to say what needs to be said as succinctly as possible in the Executive Summary. To the extent that is possible, decision-making report stakeholders should either be able to make a decision based solely on the Executive Summary or on the

Executive Summary plus whatever other component(s) of the report that is necessary and that is easily accessed through the report's table of contents;

2. What is said and how it is structured within the report is then determined by the functional (what needs to be done and its implications) and communication (what information is necessary to understanding relevant cost risk benefits and their implementation implications given what stakeholders currently know and what they need to know and given also the terminology that they are familiar with), requirements of report stakeholders. Understanding these requirements across the various report stakeholders and taking succinct positions or stating succinct messages that reflect thoughtful cross-stakeholder cost/benefit/risk trade-offs is what makes a business report compelling;
3. Reports designed to achieve initial go or go to next milestone decisions need to state very clearly the action implications of the go decision and in particular, the immediate action that is now necessary once a go decision is made, whom should be responsible for this action and on what basis will success be determined. In the case of briefing business reports, a succinct statement of the facts that will need to be taken account of in making a decision is essential, particularly in situations where a significant volume of information has been assembled. The aim therefore of a briefing document is to assist relevant report stakeholders, reduce their uncertainty to a point where it is feasible for them to make a decision.

In simple, easy to digest terms, Gradous (1999) proposes that readers of business reports want to find out:

1. What are the facts?
2. What do they mean?
3. What do we do now?

Business Report Production

Business Report Clarity

Business reports communicate ideas and other information so that report stakeholders are assisted in making related business decisions. Good reports use space, diagrams, graphs, tables appropriately named, labelled and sourced to successfully achieve the transfer of meaning from the report writer(s) to the report recipient(s).

The words chosen need to be unambiguous and sentences and paragraphs need to make sense and be well structured (Polonsky & Waller, 2005, p. 203) as ambiguity, inconsistency and incoherence can result in a business report being misunderstood or dismissed by its intended audience (Hart, 1998, p. 10). There are a number of ways to achieve clarity and reduce uncertainty in business reports (Baylis *et al*., 1997; Greetham, 2001; Schneider, 2000):

1. Choose the short simple word over the long obscure one and avoid words that are vague.
2. Use appropriate technical language.

- When there is more than one type of reader, it is important that the writer is able to predict the reader's knowledge of technical language and adjust the amount of technical language in the report accordingly. This may involve:
    - Defining the terms in the body of information to help the reader
    - Substituting complex terms with simpler terms
    - Providing a glossary of terms

3. Replace prepositional phrases with prepositions, eg replace:

- "with regard to" with "about"
- "for the simple reason" with "because"
- "on the part of" with "by"

4. Create fluency through the use of transitional elements:

But, However, On the other hand, Yet…	- indicating contrast
For example, That is…	- indicating illustration
Similarly, Moreover, Furthermore, In addition, By extension, What is more…	- indicating extension
Therefore, Consequently, As a result, Thus…	- indicating conclusion
Then, After that, It follows…	- indicating the next step

Also useful are: Likewise, Correspondingly, Hence, Accordingly, Nevertheless, Incidentally, Otherwise, Nonetheless, Obviously

Use compound transitions:

Conjunction	And, moreover; And although; And in respect; And once; And so; And while some; And as it is
Extension	So, even though; It follows then; In this way; From that angle; By the same token; On that account; Given this
Endorsement	Not surprisingly; Of course; And moreover; Most important of all; Even more; In particular
Contrast	But instead; But at the same time; And yet; But even; But then again; But perhaps; Yet still; But while
Narrative	Following this; And after that; But then; So began; But so far; More recently

5. Choose your words consciously and deliberately to convey accurately the strength of your ideas and the evidence that supports them; use words like ‘much’, ‘many’, ‘some, ‘frequently.’
6. Know how much evidence to use. ...wherever possible *show*, rather than *tell*. Don’t just state something is the case, demonstrate it with evidence. …But make sure the evidence you use has a point: that it is related to and reinforces your arguments. Irrelevant or unnecessary evidence may create uncertainty which can block preparedness to make a decision.
7. Choose the right lengths for your paragraphs (The type of information you need to give and your topic sentence will all influence the length of a paragraph)

   - Don’t use too many short paragraphs. They make the message seem disjointed and poorly organised
   - Don’t use too many long paragraphs one after the other. Important points may be lost in the mass of supporting information
   - Use short paragraphs at the beginning and end of the sections to focus the reader’s attention on your introduction and conclusion
   - Use a mixture of short and long paragraphs to maintain your reader’s interest
   - Contrast a short paragraph with a number of long paragraphs. You can highlight an important idea which you want the reader to absorb
   - Contrast a long paragraph with a series of short ones. This will allow the reader to really get into the information

Steps in writing a business report

Writing a business report can be undertaken using the following general steps (Thompson, 2005; Bournemouth University, n.d.):

- Remind yourself of the readers/users of the report. In particular, who will be making decisions based on your recommendations?
- Check through the information you have gathered and discriminate carefully between issues that are of direct relevance for inclusion in your report while ensuring that material you may have found interesting, but which is of peripheral relevance, is excluded
- Identify any assumptions your readers/users might have
- Provide the identifying information
- Define the project or problem (purpose and scope of the report)
- Give the background (if extensive, provide as an appendix)
- Give the supporting data (in summary form in the main body of the report – more extensive data, if relevant, can be included as an appendix)
- Clearly state your conclusions and recommendations

Use headings to logically divide your report into sections and thereby assist the readers in working their way through the document and/or finding specific information within it.

The following outline of generic business report components is based on a format that is prescribed in many IMIA subjects for assignment reports. In writing a business report that is not being submitted as an assignment for assessment, some sections might not be required, and the organisation of material into major sections and sub-sections might differ from the suggested outline. In particular, the inclusion of a distinct and identifiable literature review is not common in business reports. However, for reasons given later, we suggest that many business reports could benefit from a detailed literature review appendix, and that intellectual honesty as well as copyright and intellectual property law requires that sources of material and ideas be cited and sufficient details of the sources provided to allow readers to follow up, whether the learn more or to check the accuracy of what has been said.

Generic business report components

Title Page

1. The report title – short, relevant, and descriptive of the issue
2. Report authors (and student numbers where appropriate)
3. Report reference number (or subject number and title where appropriate)
4. Submission date

Table of Contents

- Including headings and sub-headings with corresponding page numbers
- If the report has appendices, these should also be listed in the table of contents

The table of contents is important as it provides the reader with a very brief overview of the material being covered in the report and the way it is structured. It also allows the reader to easily find the section/s most relevant to their needs.

Executive Summary

The Executive Summary should state:

- The issue/situation of interest
- The evidence collected
- Conclusions and recommendations
- The major benefits/costs/risks underpinning your recommendations
- The actions proposed to minimise costs and risks and maximise benefits

The Executive Summary is the most influential section of the report as it is sometimes the only part a busy decision-maker will read (and possibly base their decision on). It is therefore a summary of the entire report, outlining important learnings, and not just an introduction to the issue of concern. This section is usually undertaken after the rest of the report is completed.

Introduction

This section concisely sets the scene for the report and should therefore address:

a) The general issue being investigated and its importance
b) The main aims of the project
c) The approach used to obtain the necessary information
d) The structure of the report so the reader knows what will be discussed in each section

Background

This section sets the context of the investigation. The reader is brought up to date on the issues to be examined. The issue under consideration can also be positioned in a broader context if required. This allows the reader to understand why the particular issue of focus was chosen (Polonsky & Waller, 2005, p. 196).

Both internal and external sources of information can be referred to in order to provide situational context. More detailed background information is provided in the relevant literature review included in Appendix One. The background section of the report should mention conclusions reached from the literature review that are relied on in the report. These conclusions might range from identification of broad themes to be dealt with, through outlining contrasting positions that can be taken on particular issues, to stating a firm position. Extensive argument and discussion of controversies in the literature that are likely to break the flow of the report should be briefly summarised in the body of the report and dealt with in more detail in the literature review appendix. However, where key points in the body of the report are based on sources outside the report itself, the sources or examples of relevant sources should be cited at least where the points are first made. Note that such summary material might be best located in the Background section, or might be introduced as it becomes relevant in later sections, including the situation analysis, stakeholder consultation (eg, reference to sources that suggest which stakeholders be consulted and/or how this should be done), and possibly in the discussion of action options that leads to recommendations being made (eg, a source might identify an action possibility, or key consequences of a course of action that affect the assessment of the benefits, costs and risks of taking that option).

Situation Analysis

This section can be divided into three subsections to facilitate clarity of analysis and implications (Polonsky & Waller, 2005):

- Analysis/results
    - This is the section in which arguments are made which form the route from the original specified question/concern to the conclusion. You should aim to answer the following questions in this section:
        - What were the main results/findings of the investigation?
        - What are the implications of the information presented? (Bournemouth University, n.d.)
        - What limitations are there in the investigation?
- Implications/discussion
    - Explain to the reader what the findings mean and whether the questions asked in investigating the issue were answered and/or concerns were addressed. This discussion will be used when you are making recommendations, as well as identifying limitations and opportunities for further relevant investigation (Polonsky & Waller, 2005).
    - If you rely on personal experience of the situation as a source of evidence you will need to consider whether others have different views on the matter, and if so, how you could present those views.
    - Where views or evidence appear to conflict with each other, you will need to take a position and justify that position.
- Limitations
    - You need to objectively evaluate your work and identify things that may limit the wholehearted adoption of your recommendations (Polonsky & Waller, 2005). You may also need to identify key assumptions that need to be tracked as a basis for modifying, if necessary, recommended actions.

Stakeholder Consultations

- The stakeholders considered for consultation, the reasons for choosing those actually consulted, and the reasons for not consulting others. If your audience might not be familiar with the concept of a stakeholder, the term should be defined and the definition supported by citing appropriate references.

- If there are risks in consulting particular stakeholders (eg, due to commercial confidentiality) these need to be identified, action that could ameliorate these risks suggested, or alternative approaches for obtaining some estimate of the views of the affected stakeholders suggested.
- If, due to resource constraints, it is not considered appropriate or possible to undertake desirable consultations you need to make these limitation explicit, and suggest more limited consultations that provide some basis for assessing the views and reactions of at least two key stakeholder groups.
- The procedure used to consult the selected stakeholders should be briefly described. Any document used as a basis for presenting the recommended action to the stakeholders consulted should be included as Appendix Three.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Present a clear summary of the key conclusions arising from the Situation Analysis. The reader must be able to see how you drew the conclusions from the analysis. Do not introduce new material.
- The report should include consideration of alternative options for a resolution, give reasons for a choice between these options, and make recommendations.
- The benefits, costs and risks of taking the recommended approach should be identified and actions that could ameliorate the risks suggested. Risks include identification of stakeholders that might be disadvantaged or adversely affected, as a consequence of the recommendations made, or might (for any reason) take action to oppose or undermine the recommended actions.
- If any stakeholders will be adversely affected, discuss these effects, consider the ethical acceptability of these consequences and the relevant balance of positive and negative consequences, and give the reasons for preferring the new balance.

A reader should be able to pick up your report and grasp the most significant points by reading only the summary and the conclusions (Bournemouth University, n.d.).

The recommendations are action-oriented suggestions made by you after having thoroughly analysed and discussed the data. The recommendations are designed to provide some guidance for organisational actions based on your report. The recommendations specify what you believe is the most appropriate course of action; that is, after analysing the results, this is what you believe should be done. …In the final analysis, one of the most critical ways to evaluate your report is to ask if the reader would agree with the recommendations based on what was presented (Polonsky & Waller, 2005, p. 200).

The conclusion ties the report together and shows that the report has a clear, logical flow with a beginning, middle and end. This section allows one last opportunity to reinforce the main points of the report and encourage the acceptance of the recommendations. That is, it is also one last chance to sell what you have found (Polonsky & Waller, 2005, p. 201).

References

A list of all literature references utilised and the sources of other information specifically referred to within the project proposal document should be included here. The Harvard format (author, date) is suggested. It is vital that, throughout the report, whenever potentially relevant information or concepts are identified, the source is noted.

Including the full bibliographic reference allows the reader of the report to refer to the original materials that were referred to or used if they want to investigate a particular point for themselves.

When you reference important supporting evidence you are acknowledging the contribution of others and so are highlighting your own unique contribution. You are also providing third party support for your position and through this building 'face validity' into your document. Another important reason for referencing is that it allows the logic behind various positions to be understood at a later date when actual results are being compared against planned results.

Sloppy referencing may make the reader question other aspects of your work, and as such may make arguments, conclusions and recommendations less convincing (Polonsky & Waller, 2005, p. 202).

Therefore, all statements, opinions, conclusions or other intellectual content taken from the work of someone else must be acknowledged, whether their work or ideas are directly quoted, summarised or paraphrased.

Where Should Reference Citations be Placed?

The acknowledgement of someone else's work, by means of an in-text citation, must occur at the point in your writing where you use that information. The in-text citation should be incorporated into your work in such a way as to cause the least disruption to the reader. It must also be placed so that it is clear exactly what information is being acknowledged.

The basic in-text citation in the author-date (or Harvard) system consists of the last name of the author cited and the year of publication of the work, placed in brackets.

> When a product starts to decline in sales, for whatever reason, a decision must be made about whether to continue with the product or not (Kotler, 2000).

If a direct quotation is being used, a page number is also included.

> "Unless strong reasons for retention exist, carrying a weak product is very costly to the firm" (Kotler, 2000, p313).

Where an author's name appears naturally in a sentence, only the date needs to be enclosed in brackets.

As Kotler (2000) advocates ….

If a work has more than three authors only the first author is listed followed by the abbreviation '*et al*.' (short for *et alii* – Latin for 'and others'), otherwise all authors are listed. If the work cited is by an association, corporation etc and bears no specific author's name on the title page, the organisation is cited as the author.

Reference List

Many people confuse a bibliography and a reference list. A reference list contains only those references which you have directly cited within your work. A bibliography also includes information contributing to your work and/or thought processes but not necessarily directly cited in the report.

When listing your references in either a reference list or bibliography, there is a minimum amount of bibliographic information that should be provided:

- Author's name, including initials or given name(s)
- Title of article and journal or title of book
- Publisher of book, place and year of publication, or date of journal
- Place referred to in the book, e.g. chapter selection, page etc

For example:

Books

Kotler, P (2000) *Marketing Management*, 10th Edition, Prentice-Hall: Upper Saddle River, NJ

Chapters from Books

Shoebridge, N (1999) 'Using Successful Brand Names to Launch New Products' in Graham, P. (ed) *Readings and Cases in Marketing*, Prentice-Hall:Sydney

Articles from Periodicals

Feldman, M (1999) 'The Marketing of Coach Trips to Retired Shoemakers - A Load of Old Cobblers?' *Shoemakers' Gazette*, 3(2):1-27

On-line materials

Goldie, N (1999) *CSIRO Media Release: Korea, Australia to share environment satellite*, last updated 20 May 1999, CSIRO: Parkville VIC, viewed 26 May 1999, <http://www.csiro.au/news/mediarel/mr1999/mr99107.html>

On-line Subject Materials

IMIA (2003) *Topic 2.2 Marketing Strategy: Strategic arena framework and scenarios*, p5 (printable) Sydney, viewed 3rd June 2003

Appendices

Appendices include information that is relevant to the issue under investigation but unnecessary in the main body of the report, for example, detailed technical specifications.

Appendix One: Scope of Information Collection

This appendix has two parts: a literature review, and a description of investigation procedures.

Literature Review

The literature review provides a theoretical grounding or framework for the issue under investigation. It could also be considered a knowledge review or an information review, and may need to be titled as such in business reports that are being written outside the scope of IMIA programs in order to avoid any potential negative reactions associated with “literature review.”

By undertaking the literature review you should gain further understanding and insight into what has been done previously with respect to your issue of interest. The literature review can also help you to develop the focus of your report, design any investigation or research tools, and compare your results to those of other investigators.

The literature review should provide some rationale for the questions being asked (and answered) in the report and/or references to reported similar situations of concern that could be drawn upon. In this way you are using the literature to develop and support your ideas, suppositions, and arguments. Readers will usually be more comfortable with what you have done if there is some supporting logic for your conclusions and recommendations based on reputable information and previous experience (Polonsky & Waller, 2005, p. 197).

Note: For IMIA project work, the literature identified and reviewed should include research published in academic and business journals as well as in-house research, and should if possible include material not referred to in the Topic Notes. When drawing on references *cited in the Topic Notes, evidence that the reference has been read and understood beyond the summary provided in the Topic Notes will attract additional credit. All sources must be cited and correctly and consistently referenced.*

It is tempting when writing a literature review to organise this as a series of summaries of what has been found, source by source. This is more properly called an annotated bibliography. It fails to sufficiently analyse, and in particular fails to synthesise the relevant literature.

An effective literature review reports a synthesis of the literature. This might be organised around:

- Defining the key concepts and drawing critical distinctions – eg, defining work motivation or performance motivation, incentives, financial incentives, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, citing relevant references that are the sources of the definitions.
- Emerging themes, eg, "Within the literature on motivating individual and group performance, a major theme is the role of financial incentives" (cite sources or examples of important sources that deal with the theme).
- Within a theme, issues that are subject to controversy that generate competing propositions, or controversial propositions, can be stated, again citing sources that support or comment on each position.
- If there is an emerging consensus around one or more propositions, this can be stated, and supported by citing supporting sources. If the number of sources supporting or assuming a proposition is large, a few recent sources, and/or key historical sources that introduced the proposition, can be cited.
- It can also be useful to identify common (and often unstated) assumptions that can usefully be made explicit and subjected to critical assessment and/or empirical tests.

This allows the review to be organised under a set of sub-headings or around a series of propositions or competing propositions. Thus, rather than a typically boring description of a series of studies, the review presents an organised position about what is to be learned from the literature, with sources cited to acknowledge where ideas and propositions came from, or the sources of evidence for or against positions taken.

Sometimes it will be inappropriate to arrive at final positions, or to conclude that certain propositions are correct. Conclusions of the review might then take the form of identifying the themes or issues and the competing positions that need to be kept in mind or tested in further work.

Investigation Procedures

The steps taken to collect, analyse and report information must be described in a logical format.

Describe the kinds of information relied on, and its relevance to the issues. Indicate clearly how you established the facts you are relying on eg, was this by:

- A review of documents or internal data records
- Interviewing selected informants.
- Direct observation or personal experience
- Other ways of sourcing information.

Make explicit any limitations in the information obtained (for example, the danger in generalising to the national situation from a local investigation; informants who could not be reached whose views should be considered; relying on personal experience that might not be typical and might be subject to errors of recall).

Appendix Two: Stakeholder Consultation Material

The material actually presented to the stakeholders that were consulted, as a basis for obtaining their reactions to the revised initial analysis and recommendations.

Appendix Three: Responsibilities (team projects)

If submitting a project report undertaken by two or more participants, one appendix should outline who was involved and what the specific responsibilities of each project team member were. If all group participants contributed equally to the work, this should be noted in this appendix.

Other Appendices

Any technical matters of interest may be included here, including copies of relevant internal documents that would aid understanding of the report.

Note

Should your lecturer provide you with specific instructions regarding report components (usually included in the Subject Orientation document), these instructions should be followed in place of the guidance provided above (where there is any conflict in the instructions given).

Revising Your Work

It is likely that you will need to revise and redraft your report a number of times to increase its chances of being well received. Ask yourself the following questions as a guide for your revisions:

- Does the report flow logically?
- Have new concepts been properly introduced and clearly described?
- Do your conclusions build only on what has been provided in the report or do they rely on material that hasn't, but should have, been included?
- Is your executive summary an accurate summary rather than an introductory section?
- Have you said everything you need in order to unambiguously convey your message?
- Has information that is not directly relevant to the analysis been eliminated?
- Are your conclusions and recommendations backed up by reputable information?
- Can you reduce the chances of statements being misinterpreted?
- Are any tables or figures included adequately captioned, numbered, sourced, referred to in the text and properly explained?
- Does the document layout facilitate understanding or could it cause confusion?
- Is the material you refer to quoted in the appropriate context?
- Would any of the material presented in the main body of the report be more appropriately included in an appendix?
- Have you correctly cited and referenced information sources used in your report?

Presentations

Successful presentations

Presentations, like reports, can be considered as stories. The "story" needs to flow consistently to facilitate audience understanding. Logical inconsistencies can cause the audience to lose track of your argument or hinder them in receiving the message you are intending to send.

Edward Tufte (2003), a visual display of information guru, makes an important point about the content of presentations:

> *"Presentations largely stand or fall on the quality, relevance, and integrity of the content. If your numbers are boring, then you've got the wrong numbers. If your words or images are not on point, making them dance in colour won't make them relevant. Audience boredom is usually a content failure, not a decoration failure."*

Although you are communicating a message that you perceive to be important during a presentation, you also need to ensure that your audience, the (potential) users of the information you are providing, are your main focus. As Gunn and Gullickson (2005, p10) suggest, you need to switch your focus:

- *From* what you want to say *to* what your audience would like to hear. What would be of benefit to them?
- *From* what they will think of you *to* what might generate insights for them
- *From* trying to dazzle them with visual gymnastics *to* creating a feeling of connection
- *From* wondering how much information you can include *to* thinking about what is really important for people to remember and reflect on
- *From* delivering a good speech *to* starting a rich dialogue

Tell your audience why your message is important to them and how following it up will benefit them. Put the information into perspective for them. Audiences are looking to you to make sense of information (Friedman, 2005).

Slide design

Clutter and/or confusion are failures of design and not complexity (UW Computing and Communications, 1999). If effective communication is about getting messages across, then slides should focus on conveying these messages: not the detailed information (the *what*), but what this information means to the audience in view of the presentation's purpose (the *so what*). That is, the presentation is about what the presenter has to say, not about what can be read from the slides (Doumont, 2005).

Effective slides convey messages clearly and accurately: they are visually concise. Typically, they use a consistent layout throughout the presentation, use a single typeface at a few different sizes, and use colours sparingly: presenters can usefully develop a first design in black and white, then add colour in light touches, for emphasis or identification (Doumont, 2005).

In addition to keeping the design of your slides as clear and concise as possible, you should also ensure that you don't use too many slides, as this can cause audience fatigue and information overload. If there is further information that needs to be provided to the audience, but is not and integral part of your presentation, a handout can be sent to your audience at another time. Sending material beforehand can prime the audience and give them time to come to grips with any complex concepts you may be presenting. However, sending supporting material after your presentation allows you to adjust the information you provide based on audience reactions.

Structuring your presentation

Presentations can be divided into three main sections, the introduction, body, and conclusion.

1. **Introduction** (Storz, 2002)

- The beginning of a presentation is the most important part. It is when you establish a rapport with the audience and when you are most likely have their attention.
- If the audience does not know you, introduce yourself, or have somebody else, already known to the audience, introduce you. Do this not only to give important information so that people can identify you, but also to establish your authority on the subject and to allow the audience to see your point of view on the subject.
- Give the title and introduce the presentation. What exactly are you going to speak about? Show how the subject of your presentation affects or may affect your audience's lives. Give a rough idea or working definition of the subject.
    - Have you set any limits on the scope of your talk?
    - Have you estimated the time it will take? It is useful to give listeners some idea of how long you will speak so as to maintain their attention better
- Give your objectives (purpose, aim, goals)
- Announce your outline

2. **Body** (Storz, 2002)

- All your information should support your purpose.
- Give enough information to clearly develop your ideas. Don't forget to illustrate through examples.
- The sequence of your information can be, for example: logical; chronological; general to specific; known to unknown; accepted to controversial; cause to effect; or problem to solution

3. **Conclusion** (Storz, 2002)

- The end of your presentation should include a brief reminder of what you tried to show in your speech and how you tried to do so and a short conclusion.
- Different ways of reminding your audience of your message include:
    - Stating the point of the speech
    - Giving the essential message to retain
    - Listing the main points and what you want the audience to remember
    - Reviewing informally or indirectly by using a quote, comparison or example
- The conclusion to your presentation can include:
    - Commentary
    - Lessons learned

- Recommendations
  - Next steps
  - A call to action – what should the audience/decision makers do?
- Remember, this may be your last chance to emphasise the importance of your message and recommended actions, especially if no audience question time is available.

Getting and keeping the audience's attention

You need to ensure that you say things that your audience are likely to be interested in. This needs to be done in a manner that captures their attention. This holds true even when you have been invited to give a presentation. In informing an audience you have to adjust to what people think and any constraints as well as maintaining a dialogue (and not a monologue) with your audience. You need to arouse listeners' interest from the beginning (Storz, 2002).

Storz (2002) and Schneider (2002) have suggested a number of methods for maintaining audience attention:

- Signposting – Indicate when you have finished one section and are moving on the next. You can do this by pausing, changing your stance, and/or the pitch of your voice; separator or sub-title slides can be useful.
- Outlining options - If there are alternative ways of looking at a topic or proposal, outline them to show you are familiar with the different ways of dealing with a situation. If what you are dealing with demands a comparison of strengths and weaknesses, indicate clearly the different aspects and underline the points you feel are important or secondary.
- Rhetorical questions - In using such questions the speaker appears to be having a dialogue with the listeners, for example, "What would this imply for you, if you were a consumer of this product?"
- Emphasising/highlighting:
  - Say something is important – "The essential element is…"
  - Stress verbs with your voice – "We **experimented** with…"
  - Add auxiliary verbs for emphasis – "We **did** see a noticeable difference…"
  - Change the word order – "Good it may be, easy it isn't…"
  - Repetition – "As I've said before…"
  - Tripling, chunking, and other techniques of wordplay can be used – "This method is cleaner, cheaper, and more consistent…"

- Formulations and paraphrasing - Formulations are phrases in which we describe either what we are about to say or what we or someone else has already said, eg "I want to talk with you about a problem" and "So what you are saying is that you want me to call and cancel the hotel reservation". In the first example, the formulation sets up the conversation so that what follows will be heard as a problem. … Formulations and others' responses to them give everyone a chance to check their understanding of what was said.

- Examples and stories - Ways to make what you say more specific and concrete. A request for an example will produce a description or a story about a specific situation that can often clarify a point more than further general talk. Examples and stories are ways to share our understandings of people, places and events and to check that others have the same understandings.
- Other techniques:
    - Give an unusual fact or statistic
    - Use words like *you, we, us, our*
    - Ask the audience to do something eg, "raise your hand if…" (but don't do this too often or it may lose its impact)
    - Attitude is important – knowledge, personality, openness. Be lively and enthusiastic

Body language

Your body communicates different impressions to the audience. People not only listen to you, they also watch you. Slouching tells them you are indifferent or you don't care, even though you might care a great deal. On the other hand, displaying good posture tells your audience that you know what you're doing and you care deeply about it. Also, a good posture helps you to speak more clearly and effectively (Clark, n.d.):

- Standing erect and leaning forward communicates that you are approachable, receptive, and friendly
- Interpersonal closeness results when you and your audience face each other
- Speaking with your back turned or looking at the floor or ceiling should be avoided as it communicates lack of interest
- Eye contact helps to regulate the flow of communication, signals interest in others and increases the speaker's credibility
- If you fail to gesture while speaking, you may be perceived as boring and stiff. A lively speaking style captures attention, makes the material more interesting, and facilitates understanding
- People report that they learn less and lose interest more quickly when listening to those who have not learned to modulate/vary their voice

Dealing with questions

One of the reasons that people do not ask questions is that they think they have understood what was said and have no reason to seek clarification. Speakers must therefore take the responsibility to ask questions too, to find out whether listeners have in fact understood them as they intended and to make opportunities for repairing misunderstanding. Particularly when it is important for listeners to get it "right", speakers must take the trouble to find out what listeners think they have said (Schneider, 2002). Think of questions as an opportunity to address audience concerns and as stepping stones to repeat and reinforce key points, or deliver additional information.

Importantly, make sure you understand the question being asked of you (Storz, 2002):

- Ask a question to see if you understand
- Repeat the question in your own words to check that you have understood
- If not, ask the questioner to repeat

Different types of presentation

Different types of presentation (for example, team-to-team, individual-to-colleagues, individual-to-executive team) will require an adjustment of the techniques provided above. Presenters will need to ensure that they take into account these contextual nuances when developing and delivering their presentations.

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