

[See this page in the course material.](#)

Learning Outcomes

- Discuss the purpose of common sections of an informal report
- Determine how to organize an informal report based on audience analysis

Sections of Informal Reports

Informal informational reports typically include the following three sections:

- Introduction or background
- Support or reasons
- Summary

Informal analytical reports typically include the following four sections:

- Introduction or background
- Support or reasons
- Recommendations
- Conclusion or summary

Introduction or Background

A short section introducing the reader to the “why” of the report. In more complex reports, the introduction may include a background, a problem statement, specific objectives, or all of the above.

Support or Reasons

This is where you’ll include your facts, findings, and data. Writers new to reports may make the mistake of providing lists of data and other information found as a result of research. However, most business managers can find the information on their own with time. The purpose of this section of a report is to present a summary of main ideas from the research—it’s not simply a collection of raw data.

If more detailed data is needed, an appendix is the most likely place for key selections of raw data.

This section may include the methodology of the research.

Recommendations

This section is only found in analytical reports; it shows how data supports the recommendation given in the report. Essentially, the author connects the logical data items in a way that points to the recommendation.

Remember, the readers are expecting a recommendation with supporting data; they're not expecting to work through all the data on their own.

Conclusion or Summary

This short section wraps up the report and gives a quick summary of the information provided therein.

practice question

Sophia has noticed that the customer check-out lines at her store have been much longer than they used to be on Sundays. There used to be fewer shoppers in the morning. There have been some disgruntled customers who have asked why there are so few checkers in the morning on a weekend. Sophia asks her morning manager, Valerie, to track the number of customers at each checker stand for the next 30 days and compare it to last year's numbers. Sophia wonders if this new change is due to the performance of the local football team or due to population growth in this suburb. Valerie collects the checker stand data and starts her outline for the short report. Which major sections should her report include?

☐ introduction, support, summary

[See this interactive in the course material.](#)

Organizing based on Audience Analysis

Reports analyze the audience the same way that you would for any written communication. The difference lies in the depth of information needed. Thinking about your audience, or the stakeholders, is one of the most crucial considerations when creating a report. It's important to keep in mind that your audience may be broader than you expect: your potential readers have an interest in the report's content for many reasons based on their unique job functions. You'll want to keep in mind direct, indirect, and remote stakeholders.

To determine which types of sections you should use in your informal report, think about the purpose of the report. These sections can take inspiration from the standardized sections used in formal reports as they relate to the needs of your audience.

Organizing Your Report

Informational Report

Introduction/Background

Facts/Findings

Summary

Figure 1. Informational Report Organization

If your audience, for example, is expected to react neutrally or positively to your message, then your conclusion or recommendation should be offered **near the beginning** of the report. Thus, your report would be laid out like this. First you would write the introduction, background, or problem section. Next come your conclusions or recommendations. These are backed up by the support or reasons section, which details facts, data, or findings. The final section is typically

some sort of further discussion, analysis, or summary. Remember that introducing these sections with a descriptive heading can help your readers, especially if the sections consist of multiple paragraphs.

If the audience is expected to react negatively to your message, then the conclusion or recommendation is offered **towards the end** of the report. This alternate organization allows the reader to reach a similar conclusion to yours based upon the research and logic offered. Thus, your report would be laid out like this: First you would write your introduction, background, or problem. The next section will be the support or reasons section, which details facts, data, or findings that led you to your conclusion. Next you would include discussion, analysis, or summary. This sections is where the logical or emotional arguments that may influence the reader's understanding are made. Your report then concludes with your conclusions or recommendations. Remember that introducing these sections with a descriptive heading can help your readers, especially if the sections consist of multiple paragraphs.

Analytical Report

for a negative audience

Introduction/Background

Facts/Findings

Recommendations

Summary

Analytical Report

for a neutral audience

Introduction/Background

Recommendations

Facts/Findings

Summary

Figure 2. Analytical Report Organization

Formatting the Report

While informal reports may not use extensive or standardized labeling of sections, nor do they have required length of individual sections, each section has a unique purpose. However, these “sections” may be a couple of paragraphs rather than a fully separated section with their own headings. As the report starts to exceed a page or two, headings will provide a tremendous benefit to the reader, and to you, as the reader better understands and retains your main ideas.

A Quick Comparison: Using Headings?

Take a look at these two dummy texts to compare the structure of an informal report without headings and an informal report that uses headings. (Note that these examples only show the formatting of a report, not the ideal way to write one.)

No Headings	Using Headings
General Store is opening a new location in Q4 of this upcoming year. There are three potential locations for this new store.	Background General Store is opening a new location in Q4 of this upcoming year. There are three potential locations for this new store.
In my research, I found that location one is in a poorly trafficked area, but is more affordable. Location two is in a highly trafficked area, but is out of the current budget. Location three is just right.	Findings Location one is in a poorly trafficked area, but is more affordable. Location two is in a highly trafficked area, but is out of the current budget. Location three is just right.
After this research, I can conclude that General Store should open its new store at location three.	Recommendation General Store should open its new store at location three.

Headings can be a useful tool for helping your readers navigate directly to the information they want. Notice that the headings catch your reader’s eye much more easily than phrases such as “in my research . . .”

Practice Question

Chris's boss, Yasmin, wants to consider changing the work schedule from 40 hours over five days a week to 40 hours over four days a week. She wants to know if this will cause any employee dissatisfaction or increase the cost of overtime. Yasmin tells Chris that other organizations are making this change, and she expects that Chris's research will find that this change makes sense for increased productivity. Chris expects to write an informal analytical report that Yasmin can use to support her decision to make this change. If Chris finds evidence to support this change, which organizational format makes the most sense for his report?

☐ introduction, support/reasons, recommendation, conclusion

[See this interactive in the course material.](#)

Licenses and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Sections of Informal Reports. **Authored by:** Susan Kendall. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)

</div