

ACE Quick Guide to Writing Essays and Academic Reports

Introduction

You will complete assignments with different requirements throughout your degree apprenticeship. Two common types of assignments are **essays** and **academic reports**.

Essays are usually divided into a **small number of broad sections**, and focus on building a sustained, evaluative argument which develops from one part of the assignment to the next.

An **academic report**, however, is often divided into a **series of sections or subsections**, each of which provides a detailed analysis of a different specific topic.

Essays and Academic Reports

The table and structures below show the **standard differences** between **essays and academic reports**.

However, the content of your specific assignment will also depend on your discipline, the purpose of your work, and your audience. You should therefore **always check what you need to do** in your course and module handbooks and **clarify this with your lecturer if unsure**.

Essays	Academic Reports
Essays do not usually have an abstract or executive summary.	Reports may have an abstract or executive summary (check with your lecturer!)
Essays do not usually include a table of contents.	Reports usually have a table of contents.
Essays are less likely to be divided into sections.	Reports are divided into headed sections and sometimes sub-sections.
Essays do not usually include tables, charts, or diagrams.	A report will often contain tables, charts and diagrams.
The use of bullet points is not acceptable in an essay.	The use of bullet points may be acceptable in a report (check with your lecturer!)

(Adapted from Cottrell, 2003, p. 209)

The Structure of Essays

Introduction

Your introduction contextualises and gives background information about the topic being explored and sets out what the essay is going to cover.



Main body

Your main body is divided into paragraphs. Each paragraph transitions into the next to make a continuous, flowing text.



Conclusion

The conclusion summarises the main points made in the essay. Avoid introducing new information in your conclusion.



Reference list

This is a list of the sources explicitly engaged with in your main body, presented alphabetically by authors' surname or corporate author.



Appendices

This is the section of your assignment where you include supplementary information or unpublished material as evidence to support your main argument, such as documentation on your company's intranet.

The Structure of Academic Reports

Abstract or Executive Summary

This is a summary of the report. It is usually the last thing you write.



Table of Contents

Your table of contents shows the number of each report section, alongside its title, page number and any sub-sections.



Introduction

Your introduction contextualises and gives background information about the topic being explored and sets out what the academic report is going to cover.



Main Body

The main body of your assignment is divided into sections and subsections under headings and subheadings.



Conclusion

This may be a main conclusion or mini-conclusion for each section, depending on the assignment.



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Appendices

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Reference List

Cottrell, S. (2003). *The Study Skills Handbook*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.



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