

Guidelines for Writing an Executive Summary

An executive summary is a brief overview of a report designed to give readers a quick preview of its contents. Its purpose is to consolidate the principal points of a document in one place. After reading the summary, your audience should understand the main points you are making and your evidence for those points without having to read every part of your report in full. That's why they are called executive summaries — the audience is usually someone who makes funding, personnel, or policy decisions and needs information quickly and efficiently.

KEYPOINT: *Remember that your purpose is to provide an overview or preview to an audience who may or may not have time to read the whole report carefully*

- An executive summary should explain the purpose of the report, emphasize your conclusions or recommendation, and include only the essential or most significant information to support those conclusions. You want reader to be able to skim the summary without missing the point of main report.
- Executive summaries are usually proportional in length to the larger work they summarize, typically 10-15%.
- Executive summaries are usually organized according to the sequence of information presented in the full report. Hence, list the main points the summary will cover in the same order they appear in the main report. You may not include every point in the summary, but ensure that main ideas are covered briefly.
- Write the executive summary after you have completed the report and decided on your recommendations. Look at first and last sentences of paragraphs to begin to outline your summary. Write a simple declarative sentence for each of the main points.
- Make the summary concise, but be sure to show why you've arrived at your conclusions. Avoid unnecessary technical material and jargon.
- Don't introduce any new information that is not in your report.
- Check for errors of style, spelling, grammar and punctuation. Ask a fellow writer to proofread and edit the document.
- Executive summaries should communicate independently of the report. Ask someone not familiar with the report's examples to read your executive summary to see if it makes sense.