

## Sections of a Report

Unlike essays, reports have formal structures. When writing an essay, you need to place your information to make a strong argument. When writing a report, you need to place your information in the appropriate section.

Consider the role each item will play in communicating information or ideas to the reader, and place it in the section where it will best perform that role. For instance:

Does it provide a very brief overview of the entire research and findings?	<b>Abstract</b>
Does it provide background to your research?	<b>Introduction or Literature Survey</b>
Does it describe the types of activity you used to collect evidence?	<b>Methods</b>
Does it present factual data?	<b>Results</b>
Does it place evidence in the context of background?	<b>Discussion</b>
Does it make recommendations for action?	<b>Conclusion</b>

**For this exercise, read the following short extracts from reports found in various journals. Decide which of the above sections they are from, and why they are appropriate for this section.**

Possible answers can be found at the end of this document.

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**Example 1:** There were several barriers identified by the pharmacists to Informed Shared Decision Making (ISDM). One major barrier was perceived lack of collaboration between pharmacists and physicians. Some of the pharmacists said that they were often reluctant to intervene because physicians were not receptive to their interventions. The current literature agrees with this point of view, suggesting that most pharmacist-physician relationships in the community setting are not at a stage to allow seamless interdisciplinary collaboration. However it was surprising to find such a large number of pharmacists from the hospital category also express lack of teamwork as a barrier.

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**Example 2:** In the fatal accident case outlined, health and safety legislation had been at best misunderstood and at worse ignored. Consideration of fundamental aspects of health and safety planning under the Construction Design and Management Regulations (1994) was clearly lacking, with deficiencies apparent at both pre-contract and sitework stages. Moreover, there was disregard to fundamental health, welfare and safety provision under current legislation.

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**Example 3:** During the first 33 weeks, the mean weight decreased among those who completed the course by 5.0kg (6.5%) in women ( $p < 0.001$ ) and 11.1kg (8.25%) in men ( $p < 0.001$ ). The initial weight loss was maintained during the first year, but during the second year some of the body weight was regained (1.2kg among women and 6.5kg among men). However, at 2 years the mean weight was still significantly decreased by almost 4% in both sexes.

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**Example 4:** Tourism-led development is clearly an emerging theme in South African Local Economic Development (LED) (Rogerson, 1997, 2001), with tourism promotion geared towards community development being perceived as a viable growth option (Goudie et al., 1999; Kirsten and Rogerson, 2002; Mahoney and van Zyl, 2002). However despite the prominence accorded to tourism in South Africa's broad development vision and in many local level strategies, as Rogerson notes, in studies of LED '...tourism-led LED is markedly under-represented and little discussed' (Rogerson, 2002: 1).

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**Example 5:** Taking a memory test not only assesses what one knows, but also enhances later retention, a phenomenon known as the testing effect. We studied this effect with emotionally relevant materials and investigated whether testing facilitates learning only because tests offer an opportunity to restudy material. In two experiments, students studied prose passages and took one to three immediate free-recall tests, without feedback, or restudied the material the same number of times as the students who received tests. Students then took a final retention test 5 min, 2 days, or 1 week later. When the final test was given after 5 min, repeated studying improved recall relative to repeated testing. However, on the delayed tests, prior testing produced substantially greater retention than studying, even though repeated studying increased students' confidence in their ability to remember the material. Testing is a powerful means of improving learning, not just assessing it.

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**Example 6:** Sixteen crabs were fasted for 24 hours and then tested. In control tests, seawater was used on both sides of the Y-maze. each crab was allowed to acclimate in the maze for 8-12 hours and then tested with the effluent and seawater control. This was then repeated for the other muscle species about 10 hours later. Initial response tests were completed within 24 days.

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**Example 7:** It may at first seem somewhat surprising that acid-charcoal treatment has so little effect on the structure of serum albumin, since this protein undergoes a molecular unfolding at acid pH which exposes hydrophobic residues to the solvent, and charcoal has a tremendous affinity for such hydrophobic surfaces. A possible explanation may be that at acid pH charcoal particles do in fact become tightly "coated" with albumin which is not substantially released. Lau et al. (37) have shown that albumin treated Norit has different absorptive properties than does untreated charcoal.

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**Example 8:** As the field of artificial life emerged, researchers began applying principles such as stigmergy (indirect communication between individuals via modifications made to the shared environment) to achieve "collective" or "swarm" robot behaviour. Stigmergy was first described by Grassé to explain how social insect societies can collectively produce complex behaviour patterns and physical structures, even if the individual appears to work alone. Deneubourg and his collaborators pioneered the first experiments on stigmergy in simulated and physical "ant-like robots" in the early 1990s. Since then, numerous researchers have developed robot collectives and have used robots as models for studying social insect behaviour.

## Sections of a Report Answers

### Example 1: Discussion

This can be identified as part of a discussion section: it explains the results of the experiment, linking it back to similar findings in the background literature, and offering a judgement about the results, "it was surprising to find..." The writing style is analytical and explanatory with longer sentences.

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### Example 2: Conclusion

This is a conclusion: it is making a final summing up of the findings of the report. The style is direct and clear, with one main conclusion per sentence.

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### Example 3: Results

This is taken from a results section: it describes the results of the experiment; no explanations are given in this section, as that comes in the discussion. The style of writing is direct, clear, and simply describes the findings.

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### Example 4: Introduction / Literature Review

This can be identified as an introduction or literature review section: it compares and contrasts the previous findings of other researchers. The writing style is analytical, as it does not just summarise the research, but notes trends and also gaps.

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### Example 5: Abstract

This is an abstract: it offers a one paragraph summary of the whole experiment. The style is concise and informative because a lot of information needs to be conveyed in few words. There is one sentence describing the context, methods, results, and conclusions.

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### Example 6: Method

This is a method section: it is a concise, step-by-step description of how the experiment was conducted. The sentences are short and to the point, with no unnecessary description.

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### Example 7: Discussion

This is a discussion: it offers an explanation for the results of the experiment. It also ties these findings back to the literature from the introduction. The prose style is longer and expresses judgements, offers explanations for these and backs them up with evidence.

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### Example 8: Introduction

This is taken from an introduction: it gives a brief overview of the context of the report, and also mentions a previous body of research on which this experiment will build. Although the introduction gives a general overview, it is targeted to the specific experiment, and is not too broad.

Excerpts taken from:

1. Kassam, R., Volume-Smith, C., and Albon, S.P. (2008). "Informed Shared Decision Making: An exploratory study in pharmacy". *Pharmacy Practice*, 6(2), 57-67
2. Griffith, A. (2004). "Health and Safety Planning for Demolition Projects". *Construction Information Quarterly*, 6(1), 3-8.
3. Andersson, K., and Karlström, B., Petersson, H., Öhrvall, M., and Zethelius, B. (2008). " A Two-Year Clinical Lifestyle Intervention Program for Weight Loss in Obesity". *Food Nutrition and Research*, 52.
4. Binns, T., and Nel, E. (2002). "Tourism as a Local Development Strategy in South Africa". *The Geographical Journal*, 168(3), 235-47.
5. Roediger, H.L., and Karpicke, J.D. (2006). "Test-Enhanced Learning: Taking memory tests improves long-term retention". *Psychological Science*, 17, 249-55.
6. Ristvey, A., and Rebach, S. (1999). "Enhancement of the Response of Rock Crabs (*Cancer irrotatus*) to Prey Odors following Feeding Experience". *Biological Bulletin*, 197(3), 361-67.
7. Chen, R.F. (1967). "Removal of Fatty Acids from Serum Albumin by Charcoal Treatment". *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, 242, 173-81.
8. Fong, T., Nourbakhsh, I., and Dautenhahn, K. (2003). "A Survey of Socially Interactive Robots". *Robotics and Autonomous Systems*, 42, 143-66.