

Writing an Executive Summary

Executive summaries are designed to inform the primary readers or decision makers of what they need to know if they only have a few minutes to review a formal report. The executive summary should clearly communicate the main purpose, findings and recommendations of the report, as well as explain why readers should comply with its requests or recommendations. In *Technical Writing: A Practical Approach*, Pfeiffer and Boogerd (2000) provide some good advice about writing executive summaries:

Write it last and keep it short

- Write the whole report first, then analyze and condense the most essential information.
- It is meant to be an “easy-to-read overview” (p. 275).
- You can single-space to keep to one page if necessary.
- However, if the report is extremely long, you may extend the summary to a second page.

Keep the tone formal and don't use jargon

- Write it at a level that will be easily understood by your primary reader(s).
- Technical details can be found in the body of the report.

Use the present tense to be more persuasive

- For example, “Tests show that...,” *instead of*, “...was tested” (p. 274).

Use “short paragraphs that flow together” (p. 276)

- You may also use short lists to emphasize the main findings or recommendations.

Avoid phrases like, “additional information can be found in the report” (p. 275)

- This is obvious, and does not add anything useful to your executive summary.

Only include the most essential information

- The primary reader should be able to make a decision based on the information you provide in the executive summary.

Example:

Although many university students use technology to help them in their personal lives, there is a lag in the extent to which students are using technology to support their learning. Learning support services and centres have also been slow in supporting students' use of – and introducing students to – learning technologies that will help them with academic tasks. In an attempt to start closing this gap, this report reviews how students are already using technology to support their university learning. It also indicates ways in which Laurier Brantford's Learning Services Centre can introduce staff and students to technologies that can support the completion of academic tasks.

For each area of consideration (reading, writing, study skills), this report examines the the Learning Services Centre's current practices for assisting students, other universities' methods of supporting their students' use – or lack of use – of technology, and recommendations for enhanced learning support using technology.

In addition, this report reviews the challenges and opportunities of using learning technologies, as indicated by current research, and concludes with a summary of recommendations for service initiatives and a summary of technologies that can be incorporated into learning support practice. Key recommendations include the following:

- Enhance staff awareness of available technologies
- Enhance staff awareness of recent research on learning and technology to use information during consultations
- Incorporate technology into consultations to make activities more interactive
- Develop handout resources regarding learning technologies to improve student knowledge of challenges and benefits
- Provide workshops on incorporating technologies into study strategies

References

Guffey, M. E., & Nagle, B. (2003). *Essentials of Business Communication (4th Canadian ed.)*. Thomson Nelson.

Pfeiffer, W. S., & Boogerd, J. (2000). *Technical Writing: A Practical Approach (2nd ed.)*. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc.