



# Effective Report Writing Strategies

Monday, October 19, 2009  
8:30 am to 9:15 am, WORKSHARE

## **Presenters:**

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Georgia Southern University

Dallas/Addison Marriott Hotel



- Located in Statesboro, Georgia
- Founded in 1906
- Part of the University System of Georgia (USG)
- Public co-educational USG Regional University
- Carnegie Doctoral Research University
- **Fall 2009 Enrollment**
  - Total Enrollment = 19,000+
  - 1<sup>st</sup> time Freshmen Enrollment = 2,900+
  - Graduate Enrollment = 2,600+

# Why is Effective Report Writing Important?

Reports are one of several ways that information may be communicated to our audiences.

So often we only have one chance to “get it right”.

Providing a report that is well organized, clear, concise, and grammatically correct helps IR professionals gain respect from colleagues (and for future reports).



Source: Writing Better Reports (<http://www.scn.org/cmp/modules/rep-btr.htm>)



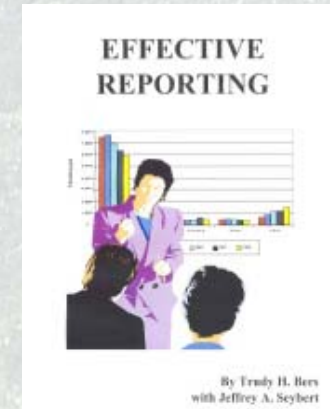


# Writing from an Institutional Research Perspective

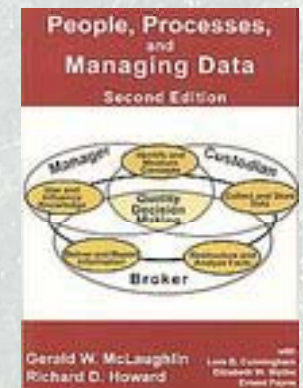
For newcomers, the Association for Institutional Research (AIR) publishes many publications geared towards providing information for institutional research professionals. For more information visit <http://www.airweb.org/>.

# References for IR

-Bers, Trudy H. & Seybert, Jeffrey A. (1999). *Effective Reporting*. Tallahassee, Florida: The Association of Institutional Research.



-McLaughlin, Gerald & Howard Richard D. (2004). *People, Processes, and Managing Data* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Tallahassee, Florida: The Association of Institutional Research.



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# Effective Report Writing Strategies

- Planning
- Organizing
- Writing
- Concluding
- Revising





# Planning the Report

- Determine need(s) if stakeholder(s) are involved.
- Keep report's purpose in mind, even if no stakeholder(s) are clearly identified.
- Identify the audience and what they (may) need in the report.
- Determine what you want the readers to know, in addition to what they may have asked.



# Organizing the Report

- Develop an outline listing topics, key points, and data required to support the purpose of the report, even if some are hypotheses or anecdotal.
- Determine the level of detail to include in the report.
- Break report into sections. This will allow easy transition for the reader.
- Remember to provide headers/footers, definitions and footnotes as appropriate.



# Writing the Report

- Form your thoughts on paper and communicate from prospective reader(s) point of view.
- Use graphical aids (i.e., tables, charts, sparklines, and graphs) to depict important data. Remember you will have different types of readers.
- Use American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines on headers, footers, charts, figures, tables, appendices, etc. This helps engage your academicians by displaying your knowledge and use of APA.



# Some Basic Do's and Don'ts

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be as precise as possible.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoid misleading information. Do not report any material which is not truthful or factual.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give an overview of the report's contents.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poor organization may lead to a confusing report.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keep it plain and simple.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do not overload the reader.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Always give credit to your sources, even if you do not use a direct quote.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inaccurate data may prompt your readers to distrust your work.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Always check grammar and spelling.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poor spelling/grammar are distracting in a report.</li></ul>

Sources: EHS Pro Gives Advice on Writing Reports ([http://ehstoday.com/news/ehs\\_imp\\_33435/](http://ehstoday.com/news/ehs_imp_33435/)),  
Report Writing ([http://business.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Report\\_Writing](http://business.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Report_Writing)), and  
Report Writing Tips (<http://www.wordsworthwriting.net/technicalwritingtipssite/REPORTWRITINGTIPS.htm>)



# Report considerations

Cover Example - recognition by audiences

Summary Example

Table Example

Chart Example

Checklist Example - Consider a report/project checklist for all staff. This helps guide all projects into consistent formatting.

Abstract Example - Consider a template for all abstracts in reports, again, prompting consistent collection of information on reports/projects.



# Writing Myths

- Writers are born, not made.
- Writing is a linear, tidy, left-to-right process.
- Writing should be the same for everyone.
- Writing is permanent.
- Writing is merely transferring thoughts from mind to paper.

**“Writing is a life-long process. Remember, there are no secrets to success, only hard work.”**

**Lorenzo Castillo**





# Concluding the Report

- Summarize the main findings of the report.
  - Do not include findings that are not relevant to the report topic.
- Do not introduce any new information not already covered in the report.
- Offer results or findings of importance from your understanding of the project or data.
- Leave a final impression on the reader.

Sources: WRITING BETTER REPORTS (<http://www.scn.org/cmp/modules/rep-btr.htm>),  
Report Writing ([http://business.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Report\\_Writing](http://business.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Report_Writing)),  
EHS Pro Gives Advice on Writing Reports ([http://ehstoday.com/news/ehs\\_imp\\_33435/](http://ehstoday.com/news/ehs_imp_33435/)), and  
Tips on Report Writing (<http://custom-writing.org/blog/writing-tips/17.html>)



# Revising the Report

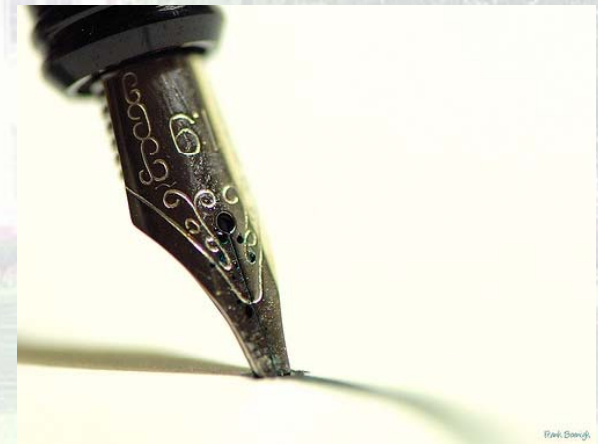
- ❖ No report is perfect.
- ❖ Well written reports are those which have gone through multiple revisions.

## A few things to remember:

- Review a hard copy.
- Read your text aloud.
- Ask for help.
- Give it a rest.
- Get peer feedback from colleagues.

# Closing Comments

When all else fails...WRITE!  
Your rewrite(s) give you the  
chance to fine tune.



# Questions



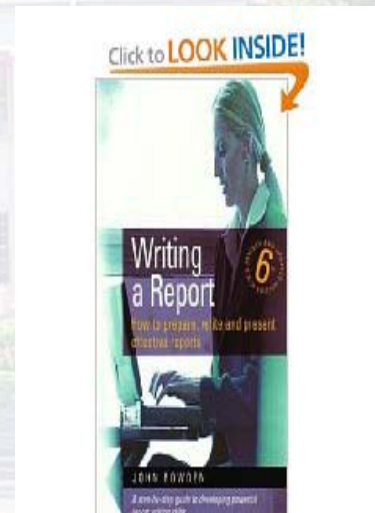
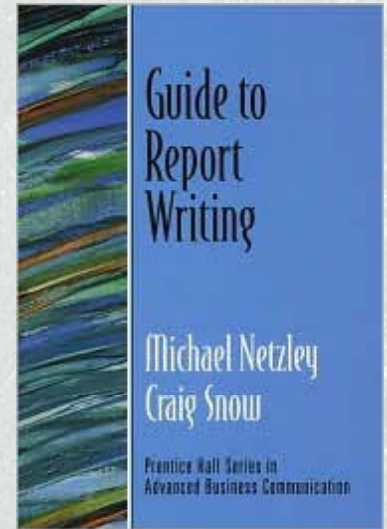
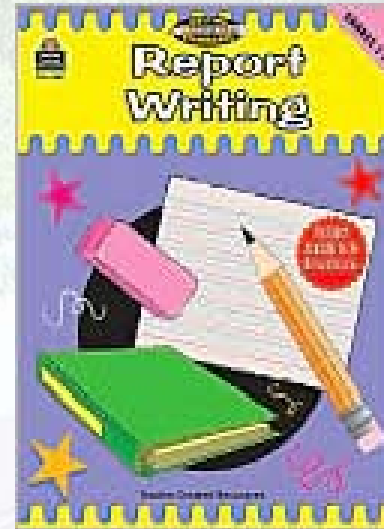
# References

## Web Links

- Report Writing Tips and Aids  
<http://www.reports.com/Aids.html>
- 7 Tips For Writing Better Business Reports  
<http://www.writinghelp-central.com/article-better-business-reports.html>
- One Step Ahead: Writing Reports  
<http://www.askoxford.com/betterwriting/osa/reports/>

## Books

- Clark, Sarah. (2000). Report Writing. Teacher Created Materials.
- Netzley, Michael & Snow, Craig. (2001). Guide to Report Writing. Prentice Hall.
- Bowden, John. (2002). Writing a Report (6<sup>th</sup> edition). Parkwest Publications



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- Tufte, Edward R. (1997). Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press.
- Vollmar Ron & Gerber Andrea. Effective Report Writing PowerPoint Slide. <http://www.nlssa.com/Restricted/Materials/EffectiveReportWriting>





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