Formal Reports

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Subject: The Anatomy and Creation of Formal Reports

As we have discussed in class, there are a wide variety of forms that business writing can take, and few are as rigorous and detailed as that of the formal report. Formal reporting often changes drastically to match the purpose(s) of the investigative, evaluative, or analytical end goal that the authors are seeking to uncover or better understand when they begin their research. Formal reports can be best understood via two key points: *the anatomy of formal reports*, and the *process of writing a formal report*.

The Anatomy of Formal Reports
Over the last month, we have investigated what goes into various forms of formal reporting; the time and research involved as well as the dedication to a seemingly rigid set of anatomical rules directly relating to the purpose of the report.

Front Matter
The very beginning of the formal report is represented within the Title Page, a single indicator of what the report is about, with no absolutely established convention beyond that. While it is common to have other information included, reports that are published as article often truncate the title page to include details as simple as the authors and source of publication.[1] The opening to a formal report is commonly as far as many readers ever get, using the abstract as a gauge of how the purpose of the report relates to the reader's interest in the subject. Depending on the content of the body, the end of the front matter will include lists of various figures, tables, and a simple glossary of jargon, symbols, or other abbreviations that might be difficult for one of the intended audience to understand. The front matter is commonly finished with a Table of Contents, detailing the report's contents as well as the pages of said content.

Body
The main section of a formal report is filled with body text and any form of diagram or chart that helps to illustrate the points that the text is making. Before that, however, there is oftentimes an executive summary takes a more in-depth look at the information that will be provided in the

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[1] Stephen T. Musasa, et al. (2019, September 19). *Fruit fly identification, population dynamics and fruit damage during fruiting seasons of sweet oranges in Rusitu Valley, Zimbabwe.*

report. This part is generally reserved for lengthier or more technical reports that need extra explanation.[2] Following this section comes the introduction, which is just as it sounds. The introduction is divided into different sections that describe the purpose, outline the issues discussed, briefly introduce important discoveries, and chronologically explain the topics covered by the report.[3] After the skeleton of the report is described, the body text of the work follows. The body text is one of the major aspects of a formal report. However, depending on the type of report, the body text will differ in its different parts. Despite this, all formal reports contain relevant background information, processes of research, data tables or graphs, and the findings of the report in the body text.[4] The following parts of the body are the conclusions, references, and works cited. These are the final statements. They state what the findings of the report mean, provide further action recommendations, and cite any and all sources that were used in research for the report.[5] These three functions help summarize and provide proper credit.

Back Matter
The information-packed notation and clerical section of a formal report begins with a bibliography. This is a listing of all the sources used in research and preparation for the report. It is not necessary if a report has a full and complete works cited but can be used if a report writer consulted sources not cited in their work. Also included in the back matter is an Appendix. This is a collection of any and all charts graphs or other infographic material used or referenced in the report. This can be useful to reference to in a report without having to break up the text with an intrusive chart. A glossary is a listing of all specialized terms used in the report that readers may not know. It is used to provide context to much of the jargon used in formal reports. Finally, the index is a list of all the major topics and subtopics found in the report as well as the page number where they could be found. This is always the last thing in a report.

The Process of Writing a Formal Report
When you tackle such a massive project like writing a formal report, it is important to break up the entire process so it can be paced out in a digestible manner, making for the best end-product and the most effective use of time. The process of writing a formal report can be broken down into five key steps, regardless of the variety of report you are writing:
  1. Planning - The preliminary stage of creating a formal report consists of professionally budgeting time and resources around how to best tackle the report's creation and pursuit of a given purpose for a given audience or audiences.

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[2] Formal Report. University of Arkansas, Sam M. Walton College of Business. Business Communication Center.
[3] Formal Report. University of Arkansas.
[4] Business School: Writing a Report. UNSW.
[5] Business School: Writing a Report. UNSW.

2. <u>Researching</u> - When broken up into sections or chapters, researching can hone-in on specific aspects of the overall issue and more effectively contribute to the writing of that particular piece of the entire report.
3. <u>Reviewing</u> - As with most forms of professional writing, checking and double-checking your own work as well as the contributions of others is a vital step in making the highest-quality piece of writing by the end of the writing process.
4. <u>Revising</u> - Because no original draft is ever perfect, the common practice of revising and rewriting sections of the report based on team feedback and the established goals of the report is key in finalizing the content right before the last step of the writing process.
5. <u>Publishing</u> - The final step a formal report must take before entering the realm of legitimized business writing. Under a particular business, organization, or publisher, the report is released as its own work or part of a larger piece of print or digital media.

Recommendations

After completing our research on the many types of formal report, how they relate to one another and how they differ, we can reach the conclusion that formal reporting is a complicated and multifaceted form of business communication that requires thorough planning and a clear understanding of the writing's purpose. Something important that *Writing that Works* overlooks on a few occasions is the value of stretching or breaking convention. While formal reports are still professional documents, they have a wide variety of structural pieces and foundations that become optional or can change forms based on the purpose of the report. The bottom line of any formal report is its purpose and how to best convey that purpose to its audience(s), and bending the existing anatomy of a report to better suit the writing process you or your team has adopted can be a vital tool in achieving this end that the textbook overlooks.