

5 Mistakes to Avoid When Writing Reports

Creating First-Rate Reports!

Whether you have to write reports regularly as part of your job, or it's something you only delve into every so often, it's important to make sure you are producing the best reports possible.

Reports are there to show your business how different areas are performing, and give staff members the important data they need to complete their work. It's vital that the reports you produce convey the correct message and are actually helpful to the people who are going to read them.

To make this as easy as possible we've highlighted 5 mistakes you may be making when creating those reports so you can avoid them in the future!

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1. Ask Your Audience

If you're creating different reports for different audiences, the last thing you want to do is just reproduce the same style of report for everyone. Perhaps your CEO likes to see all the facts and figures in their report so they can get a real idea of the big picture, but maybe your Team Leaders are more interested in seeing the data displayed in graphs, so they can get a quick overview of the business without having to read pages and pages of numbers.

The best way to see how your audience would like their [reports](#) displayed is simply to ask them! You'll most likely know exactly what exact data and what level of data all your different audiences need to see to make the reports useable, so take a bit of extra time to find out how they like their reports structured and presented as well.

2. Waiting Too Long

Obviously things like your annual report only need to be done once per year, but what about all the other areas of your business?

Some things may need reported on pretty regularly if you're actually going to study the data they produce and then base business decisions on what you find.

For example, if you only report on how many students are dropping out of your classes every six months instead of monthly, that's a long time where a problem may be affecting students and you've not given yourself the opportunity to fix it. If you had reported on this monthly, you may have noticed a pattern after a couple of months and taken actions to fix whatever was wrong.

Really think about how important the data is in your reports, and how often you need to be analysing this data to allow your business the chance to improve wherever possible.

3. Don't Complicate It

A lot of the time your report may just be data collected into tables and graphs for people to view, but sometimes you need to include some written explanation with your reports to explain what's actually going on. This will allow everyone to get a clear picture of what the data is showing, and will give you the chance to highlight particularly important bits that should be focussed on.

The most important thing here is to make sure you don't overcomplicate the report and make it more confusing instead of making it clearer.

Don't write more than you need to. The numbers should mostly be able to speak for themselves, so just include enough context so that everything makes sense. Don't type pages of copy to go with one graph, as chances are you'll just confuse people and they'll tune out and miss the important stuff.

Also make sure you write using clear language and avoid [jargon](#)! You may want to show off your writing skills, but this isn't the best platform for that. Just give simple explanations so all the data makes sense and clearly connects to each other and leave it at that!

4. Padding

It can be tempting to make reports look really important by making them as long as possible and full of impressive looking data, but it's vital you only include the data people actually need to see! If someone wants to see every single number connecting to one area of the business, be happy to provide them with it if it's appropriate, but don't make everyone trawl through all the data trying to guess which bits are important.

You may think a twenty page report is going to look more impressive than a one page report, but the truth is the important data should be the only focus of any report, and if there's only one page worth to display then that's all there is! Bigger isn't always better!

5. Proofread

We've said the numbers should speak for themselves, but that doesn't mean they will always make sense! It's still a really good idea to make sure you proofread any report before you send it out. Obviously if you've written any content to go along with it this will need to be proofread, but it's also vital to make sure the numbers look like they make sense.

Maybe someone misentered a decimal point in their figures, or maybe you took some data from a spreadsheet where the formula was mistyped. This could lead to your numbers being all over the place and data being misrepresented in the [report](#), giving you an inaccurate picture of how the business is performing.

Take a little time to check over everything before you send it out to anyone else, and maybe even ask someone else to take a quick glance over it to make sure everything makes sense. Another pair of eyes will always be able to help you ensure all your written content makes sense and does an accurate job of explaining the data presented.

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