

Incorporating Appendices in Technical Reports

For those who may be vague on the function and/or mechanics of incorporating appendices (or, if you prefer, appendixes) in technical reports, this handout serves as a short refresher.

Function of Appendices

The most colorful definition of appendix functionality I've ever come across was provided by Dr. Jennifer Widom, Computer Science department chair at Stanford:

“Think of appendices as random-access substantiation of underlying gory details.”¹

Another way to think of appendices is as containers for supporting documentation that, at least in its entirety, is not essential for clarifying / justifying a report finding or conclusion but *does* substantiate that finding or conclusion in a meaningful way. It may be appropriate to include a subset of this information in the body of the report, but placing the complete data set to an appendix for optional review does not create a content or logic gap in the primary document.

Here are two questions to help you determine whether a given set of supporting information is appendix-worthy. Your answer to *both* of these questions should be a clear Yes.

1. Is the information directly relevant to an argument or claim made in your report?
2. Are some of your readers likely to find it useful for assessing the validity of that argument or claim?

Appendix Lettering Conventions

If you have only one appendix, simply call it the "Appendix." If you have multiple appendices, assign them letters: Appendix A, Appendix B, and so on.

Note: Appendix sequence is determined by order of mention in the report body. That is, in the report body, the first mentioned appendix should be labeled Appendix A; the second mentioned appendix should be labeled Appendix B, and so forth. So if, for instance, you notice when proofreading that Appendix C is mentioned in your report before first mention of Appendix B, you either need to insert an earlier reference to the currently designated Appendix B (assuming there is a logical place to do so) or reverse the order of those two appendices and re-letter them accordingly.

Appendix Titles

Include a descriptive title for each appendix. This title will be included in the Table of Contents (and of course at the top of the appendix itself), but it should NOT be part of the appendix references in the body of your report. (See examples below.)

Illustration and Equation Numbering in Appendices

As in the report body, figures, tables, and equations included in appendices should also be numbered and captioned. Illustration and equation numbering “starts over” in appendices rather than continuing the numbering sequences in the text body. In the first-listed appendix, figures should be numbered Fig. A-1, Fig. A-2, and so on; tables should be numbered Table A-1, Table A-2, etc., and equations should be numbered Eq. A-1, A-2, etc. In the second-listed appendix, illustrations and equations should follow a B-1, B-2, B-3 pattern.

Appendix Listing in Table of Contents

In a TOC listing, appendices can be treated as major headings (see Fig. 1 below) or they can be treated as subheadings within a single major “Appendices” heading (Fig. 2). In either case, they are not part of the report body and so should NOT be preceded by chapter numbers.

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Figure 1. TOC format for appendixes treated as major headings

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Figure 2. TOC format for appendixes treated as subheadings

Note: If your report includes only one appendix, you can simply use “APPENDIX: *Appendix Title*” (without the letter A designator) as the TOC entry.

Referencing Appendixes in the Report Body

Just as every figure, table, and reference listing contained in your report must be cited at least once in the report body, so too must the report body include at least one explicit reference to each of the appendixes. In these references, clearly state the connection between the appendix information and the current point of discussion. Here are several examples:

- The engineering calculations that support this design can be found in Appendix A.
- Key interview findings are presented and discussed below; the full interview transcript appears in Appendix B.
- To view the complete set of part and assembly drawings, refer to Appendix C.
- Appendix C contains the entire set of part and assembly drawings.
- The process was implemented exactly as outlined in our 8 Nov. 2011 project proposal, a copy of which is included as Appendix A of this report.

¹ Widom, J. (2006). Tips for writing technical papers. Retrieved from <http://infolab.stanford.edu/~widom/paper-writing.html>. Accessed 2 November 2011. (You’ll find some great grammar tips at this link, too.)