



# Technical Writing Process:

## A suggested approach to writing technical reports

This module describes how to get organized and begin the technical report writing process.

In the past, you were probably instructed to create an outline before attempting any writing project. However writing an essay or a piece of persuasive writing is quite different from writing a technical report and thus preparing a traditional outline is often not practical. You may want to consider creating an outline using a “story-board” approach (Poe, 2005). According to Poe, the storyboarding approach is likened to the filmmaking process. You start by defining the overall vision (purpose) of the “story” (the report body), and then each section of your report is viewed as a “scene” in the overall story. Once you have identified all the necessary “scenes” (sections), you start gathering/creating the necessary graphics and visuals to support the text and begin writing, one section at a time.

It is important to realize that you should not write a technical report in a linear sequence, beginning with the introduction. Even though it is one of the first sections of any report, the introduction is often written last! **You cannot effectively introduce what you have yet to create** so start writing the main body sections first.

### DOCUMENT PLANNING

**To plan your document, you should jot down brief answers to the following questions:**

1. What is the main purpose of my report? Be sure you have a clear answer to this question before proceeding. If not, seek advice from a colleague or supervisor before continuing.
2. What topics need to be addressed? These topics will likely become the working titles for each main body section.
3. What information needs to be described/supported/explained for each topic? This information will end up as subsections within each of the main sections, as appropriate.
4. Does the flow of ideas within this “outline” make sense and reflect the overall purpose as defined in step 1? If yes, start adding content to the sections. If no, review and revise your plan.

## THE WRITING PROCESS - summarized

### **Step 1: Organize your data and information sources and describe the overall purpose of your report**

- ✓ Decide the overall purpose and message of the report
- ✓ Collect all your sources of information
- ✓ Plan which figures and tables need to be included and decide where they should be placed

### **Step 2: Plan the body of the report**

Decide who the target audience will be and write accordingly. Think:

- ✓ What is their level of familiarity and expertise?
- ✓ What is their motivation for reading?

Think about the desired length and depth required in the report. Consider:

- ✓ How much background information do I need to provide?
- ✓ Which topics/sections do I need to include?

### **Step 3: Write the main body of the report**

Consider starting with any scope, methodology, and analysis sections first. The introductory sections are often not the best place to start.

### **Step 4: Add the introduction, summary, and concluding remarks sections**

After you have created your “story” (main body) containing the figures, tables, described methodology, analysis, etc., then you can add an overall introduction, summary and make conclusions and/or recommendations.

### **Step 5: Add “front” and “back” matter**

- ✓ Things such as title page, table of contents, acknowledgments, references, and appendices.

### **Step 6: Proofread, edit, peer review**

Re-read to ensure clarity and completeness; correct any mistakes in spelling, grammar, style, etc. Be sure that:

- ✓ Sections are ordered logically and with descriptive headings and subheadings
- ✓ Figures support the text and are clearly and accurately labeled and cross-referenced
- ✓ Irrelevant material that does not support the big picture is removed

## References

Poe, M. (2005, September). *Effective Written Communication: Storyboarding a Technical Report*. Retrieved from Technical Communications in Mechanical Engineering: <http://web.mit.edu/meugoffice/communication/>