

INFORMATIONAL REPORTS

Let's talk for a minute about informational reports. The purpose of an informational report is always to inform. You need to always know who your audience is and who your role is in relation to the audience. Who do they expect you to be? You also always need to keep in mind the effect that you want to have on your audience. Do you want them to be informed after they read your report? Do you want them to be persuaded? Do you want to simply document an event? There is some common types of informational reports directives, field reports, incident reports, minutes, and progress or status reports.

DIRECTIVES

Directives always come from a place of authority. You are directing someone or group of people to do something or to not do something. Directives purpose is always to instruct or clarify. Sometimes you need to persuade them to follow the instructions or persuade them that your clarification is correct, and many times, it has to document a change or something that you are implementing.

FIELD REPORTS

Field reports are always from expert observations. If you're filling out a field report, you're the expert. Field reports always go to an informed audience. They know what your Field Report is generally about, what your general topic is. They are expecting a field report. This is never coming out of the blue. It's not a cold call. The purpose of a field report is to describe, to explain, to document, and sometimes even to recommend. This all changes based on the purpose of you filling out the Field Report. Sometimes it's for research. Sometimes it's investigative. There's a wide variety of field reports that can be completed, but in general, you are always talking from a place of expertise to someone who knows, in general, what your topic is.

INCIDENT REPORTS

Incident reports are used to document an incident, usually some kind of injury or an accident. Usually these are done inside of a form. If you're working with an organization, they're going to have a form for the incident report. You always want to make sure that you have the necessary information. What was the date of the incident? Who was involved, and who observed but this wasn't necessarily impacted? What happened? And why, in unbiased terms, did it happen? Sometimes it is a simple observation. You're just saying why were they injured. Oh, they slipped. Sometimes it's the result of a complex investigation. Sometimes incidents reports are filled out on the job because something massive happened and months of research will go into filling out an incident report. The incident report will also address what's been done to follow up with the incident and what will be done in the future to follow up.

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting minutes are also usually taken in a template. Word has a ton of templates for meeting minutes. They're always from a member who's present at the meeting, and they're always supposed to be objective - free from opinion or prospective. Whenever somebody reads minutes, it should be like anybody in the room could have written them, and you don't have any idea about the opinion of the person writing them. Usually a set of minutes will go to the members who were present at the meeting so they can recall what happened, but it's also used for members who were able to make it to the meeting, so that they understand what happened at that meeting is a missed. The necessary information for minutes is the date, time, and location of the meeting. Who called the meeting? Who attended the meeting? Who the note taker was. And then go through the agenda items as they're addressed in the meeting. Document the main points of discussion and the person who led that part of the discussion. List any action items and the deadline for the action items.

LAB REPORTS

Lab reports are documents used to report on an experiment. While they still rely heavily on word choice, phrasing, clarity, and the other writing skills you practice in writing classes, these are also very

different from the documents that you've written before. First, you must use *passive* voice throughout the entire report. Passive voice is a way of removing the first person from the sentence and making the object receiving the verb the subject. For example, instead of writing "I poured water into the beaker," you would write that "water was poured into the beaker" or "the beaker was filled with water."

Lab reports require a great deal of detail in order to be precise and accurate. However, when you are conducting an experiment, you will rarely have time to stop and write up your previous step in the report. In order to collect accurate data, scientists take a lot of notes, equations, questions, and actions taken during the experiment. While it might seem odd to take notes over experiments you do in the science classroom with assigned experiments that rarely go wrong, it's a good idea to get into the habit of taking lab notes now if you plan on going into the sciences. Experiment with methods for taking notes, different types of pens and notepads, and develop a shorthand for common terms. Starting now means that you will have a good foundation in this area when you start working in a lab or in the field.

Lab reports also rely heavily on a standard structure to help the reader find exactly what they are looking for. The audience for lab reports, which is almost always other scientists, will not read a lab report from beginning to end. Instead, the reader will navigate to the section that is supposed to contain the information that they need. Because of this, it is very important to always follow the correct structure for a lab report. The report always begins with a clear, explicit, and direct title. This is followed by an abstract. While this is not always required in science classes, it helps the reader find relevant information. The abstract addresses the purpose, approach used, and significance of the experiment.

The next section is the introduction. This should move from general to specific, much like the introduction to a standard essay. This is where you establish the context of the experiment, address the background and relevant secondary research, and touch on concepts that impact the experiment. At the end, directly addresses the singular purpose of the experiment. While this isn't a formal thesis, it should be clear, direct, and establish the purpose of the document firmly.

After the introduction comes the method and materials section. This addresses what is being done and what is being used. This is often provided in a science classes, so you can often simply state that the experiment was completed as assigned. However, this is also where you would note any errors

or changes that were made to the assigned experiment. For example, accidentally substituting sugar for salt or adding 3 cups of water instead of 1/3 cup of water. Whether large or small, changes to an assigned experiment can change the outcome, and it is important to note them in the method and materials section. This is where your instructor will look for the cause of an incorrect results section.

Results are where you place the data derived from the experiment. This is always in past tense, but you do not come to any conclusions in this section. The only content here is the data.

In the discussion section, however, you should attempt to come to a conclusions about your experiment and engage in a discussions of the results, what they could mean, and what further questions the results might have raised. You should also address any inconclusive data here.

PROGRESS REPORTS

Progress or status reports are filled out for variety of reasons. Anytime someone wants an update on your progress or an update on the status of a project, they're going to ask for a report. Sometimes these are very short; sometimes they're very long sometimes; sometimes they follow a form; sometimes they don't. It all depends on the culture of the organization that you're working within. So these are always going to an audience familiar with the project. They're always going out in order to document progress. Usually they're going out to satisfy a supervisors need to know. Sometimes they're going out to get permission on changes, and sometimes they're going out to alert supervisors to potential problems.

The introduction to a progress report should accomplish the following: you want to identify the document as a progress report, and you want to describe your project or signed work. Just a brief overview because the person reading it will probably be familiar with what's going on with your project, but they might not be intimately familiar enough with it to understand what you're about to discuss. State that you're describing the progress made since your last progress report. It is always a good idea to put the date of the last progress report, so if they wanted to go back and find it, they know if they have the most recent one when they find one.

In the discussion, you explain what you've accomplished. You need to be clear and correct in the sections so that your reader is not misled. Make sure you are very accurate. Narrate each task

thoroughly, what you've done and accomplished, what you expect to progress into the next phase, any problems that you've encountered. This should be both expected problems and unexpected problems. Make sure to use complete sentences and don't include any empty sections. Don't just include a header or something and that that's blank and don't use filler or fluff.

There are two different ways that you can organize your progress report. you can organize it kind of based on topics so you can have a section for work accomplished, then progress expected, then problems encountered and, you know, have the work accomplished for Task 1 and Task 2, and then the progress expected for Task 1 and Task 2.

Or, if you have two tasks like this example you can have a section for task one and list the work accomplished, progress expected, and problems, and then go into task two work accomplished, progress expected, and problems that you encounter. Which one you use will really have to do with what kind of project you're working on, what your supervisor or the person looking at the progress report will expect, and certain situations will lend it to one style of organization or another

In the conclusion to your progress report, you want to make sure that you are giving an overview of your progress in general. You want to re-estimate your ability to hit your deadline, so if you would think that you might be able to finish early, you in a state that. If you think you might be a little bit late, you want to state that too, because you always want to give him a heads up ahead of time in this progress reports that they can adjust their expectations. You also want to be polite and offered answer any questions or concerns that the person reading your progress report might have.