



Faculty of Engineering
and Applied Science

WRITING INTRODUCTIONS & SUMMARIES

While there is some overlap in the function of an introduction and a summary, they are considerably different from one another. This document describes the differences between these two elements of technical writing. It then gives a suggested process for writing a summary and an introduction.

PREPARING AN INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY FOR YOUR REPORT

Read the table below and use the methods provided on pages 2-3 to write these sections of your report.

Table 1: Introductions vs Summaries Explained

INTRODUCTION	SUMMARY
Provides the background to allow the reader to understand the report's contents	Provides a summary overview of the report's contents – usually found in technical reports
Includes the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose/motivation of the report • Relevant background info that sets the broad context of your report topic • Outline of the what you will find in the report, i.e. how it is organized • Any limitations of the project, i.e. depth and extent of the study 	Includes the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief background info • Purpose/motivation of the report • Methods/procedures followed • Results/findings • Conclusions • Recommendations and implications
<u>Does not</u> include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual results • Conclusions • Recommendations 	<u>Does not</u> include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "New information" – only info already found in the report • References
Length <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually 1-2 pages • Usually multi-paragraph 	Length <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually less than one page • Often one paragraph

THE 5-QUESTION METHOD FOR WRITING SUMMARIES [1]

By using the following questions as writing prompts, you should be able to fashion a report summary that meets the objectives, as stated above in Table 1. The “answers” to the questions below should be no more than two or three sentences each. Be sure to address each question/point in the order presented below.

1. Context/Motivation: What is the context for the issue/problem/project? Why do the problem/results matter? The motivation statement may be similar to that found in your Introduction.
 2. Problem/Purpose: Why was the study/research/work performed? What problem are you solving? What question are you answering? What is the scope of your work?
 3. Approach/Methodology: How did you solve or make progress on the problem? Briefly describe your basic methodology, being sure to list the key techniques used and to highlight any distinctive features of your approach.
 4. Findings/Results: What did you learn? Anticipate and answer your readers’ most important questions about the information. Summarize key findings such as quantitative results or trends. Highlight and explain any new or unusual results. Use only the high-level information; save the details for the discussion in the report.
 5. Conclusions/Recommendations: What is the solution to the problem? What is the answer to the question? What are the implications of your answer—the basis for the recommendation? What is the significance of what you learned? What is the path forward?
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THE 3-STEP METHOD FOR WRITING INTRODUCTIONS [2]

A well-written introduction motivates readers to read the report. The role of an introduction is to provide the context and background to allow the reader to focus on, fully understand, and assess the significance of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations presented in the body of the report.

In the introduction the writer defines the purpose of the work that was done, describes the problem that was investigated, and previews the report by explaining its organization and scope. **The introduction, unlike the summary, does not include findings, conclusions, or recommendations.**

To write an effective introduction, consider using the following template:

1. Start with opening statements that describe the context and purpose of the report.

For example, your opening statement may read something like:

“A client approached XYZ Inc. to design a ...”

“This report provides an overview of...”

“This project was undertaken in response to the need for...”

“Accomplishing “X” can sometimes prove difficult due to “Y”. As such, XYZ Inc. was tasked with...”

2. Briefly describe the background information needed to understand the stated purpose or goal of the project.

This should be a multi sentence paragraph(s) that includes evidence that research has been undertaken to fully understand the problem. For example, you may begin something like:

"The team addressed this problem by investigating"

"In order to address the problem, the team began by...."

"Preliminary investigation of the problem revealed that..."

3. Describe the scope and contents of the report WITHOUT detailing results.

Here you provide the reader with an overview of what is contained in the report – the project objectives, the report structure and contents, as well as any limitations. For example:

"This report details the outcomes of..." describe the process/steps of the project, describe what is contained in the report – any preliminary work, methods, what was analyzed, etc. Remember that the purpose of the introduction is not to summarize your project but to rather to provide the "lead up" to the body of your report so that the reader can become aware of what to expect.

Use words and expressions which clearly show the "plan" of your report. For example:

"The report contains "X" main sections. First the reports addresses..., Next, it includes..., Additionally..., Furthermore..., Finally..."

References

[1] The Writing Center Inc., "Abstract, Summary, or Introduction? A 5-Question Method for Writing Executive Summaries," 2016. [Online]. Available: <http://www.writingcenter.com/2014/09/10/abstract-summary-or-introduction-a-5-question-method-for-writing-executive-summaries/>.

[2] The Writing Center, Inc., "Abstract, Executive Summary, or Introduction? A 3-Question Method for Writing Introductions," 2016. [Online]. Available: <http://www.writingcenter.com/2014/09/26/abstract-executive-summary-or-introduction-a-3-question-method-for-writing-introductions/>.