**13. Writing and Presenting your Project Report**

Writing is a powerful way of learning (Griffiths, 1993). According to Phillips and Pugh (2000) that writing is the only time when we really think. If writing is synonymous with thinking, then writing is something you should do throughout the whole research process.

This means that writing your project report should be done as each part of the research process is completed and to write as a continuous process throughout the research.

You need to create time for writing your research project. It is helpful to have blocks of time where writing can take place on successive days. This is to ensure a degree of continuity of ideas into your research.

Furthermore writing is actually a creative process and that it should be done when your mind is at its freshest. You should find a place conducive to do your writing where there is little interruption in order to enhance your productivity.

You should set your own realistic targets for the period of writing e.g. how many words you would write for each period of time you are writing. This is the height of self-discipline.

You need to use a word processor for writing your research report. In writing a research report involves much changes and rewriting as more data are collected and new ideas are evolved. There is much updating and deleting of text to improve the research report. At the end of the day you have to express your ideas with brevity, clarity and accuracy.

As a guiding principle, it is essential to construct a plan as a guide, before you start writing. This plan is like a flow chart with the sequential steps or stages in an orderly and coordinated manner and more importantly it provides the direction and scope on what information to gather to achieve the purpose of the research study.

Take the ‘clustering’ method of Veroff (2001) where it is indicating the following stages:

1. Write the main topic in the middle of a sheet of paper.
2. Jot down the other ideas that occur to you at other points on the page.
3. As the page begins to fill, relationships between the ideas suggest themselves and lines between the ideas may be drawn.
4. This allows you to group the ideas into discrete but related ‘chunks’, which enables you to devise an outline structure for a section or chapter.

Many writers prefer to finish their writing session while they are in the middle of a section to which they will look forward to returning. You must not leave a complex section half completed as it will be difficult to pick up the threads later on.

It is advisable to get your friends to read your work, even it is in a draft form. Ask your frind to be constructively critical. Your friend must be prepared to tell you about things in the text that are not easy to understand – to point out omissions, spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Overall your friend must tell you whether the piece of writing makes sense and achieves its purpose. If your project report does not communicate to the reader in the way it should you will get it back for revision work in the long run. It is much better to try and to ensure that this does not happen.

**Suggested Structure for your Project Report**

Robson (2002) has provided a general structure for a project report:

1. Abstract
2. Introduction
3. Literature review
4. Method
5. Results
6. Conclusions
7. References
8. Appendices

This suggested structure is good for the deductive approach. It assumes that the literature was reviewed to establish the current state of knowledge on the topic and this informed the method adopted. Reporting the findings in a factual manner gives rise to a detailed consideration of what these findings mean to the specific piece of research that has been conducted and to the current state of knowledge on the topic.

However if your research is essentially inductive, you may structure your report in a different way. You may tell your story (i.e. to explain your conclusions) in the early part of the report. This may include a clear explanation of how this story relates to the existing literature on the topic. This could be followed by a detailed explanation of how you arrived at these conclusions.

Coming back to the general structure, each of the sections can be subdivided into one or more relevant chapters depending on the topic and the way in which you want to present your particular ***storyline***. This is a vital point. Your structure should have a clear flow.

The Abstract

This is probably the most important part of your report because it may be the only part that some will read. It is a short summary of the complete content of the project report. This abstract prepares the readers for what is to come. It should contain four short paragraphs with the answers to the following questions:

1. What were my research questions, and why were these important?
2. How did I go about answering the research questions?
3. What did I find out in response to my research questions?
4. What conclusions do I draw regarding my research questions?

Smith (1991) lists five principles for the writing of a good abstract:

1. It should be short. Try to keep it to a maximum of two sides of A4. Some universities stipulate a maximum length, often 300 - 500 words.
2. It must be self-contained. It must summarise the complete content of your report.
3. It must satisfy your reader’s needs. Your reader must be told about the problem, or central issue, that the research addressed and the method adopted to pursue the issue. It must also contain a brief statement of the main results and conclusion.
4. It must convey the same emphasis as the report, with the consequence that the reader should get an accurate impression of the report’s contents from the abstract.
5. It should be objective, precise and easy to read. The project report contents page should give you the outline structure for the abstract. Summarising each section should give you an accurate resume of the report. The abstract is not the place for elaborating any of your main themes. Be objective. You will need to write several drafts before you eliminate every word that is not absolutely necessary. The purpose is to convey the content of your report in as clear and brief a way as possible.

***Writing a good abstract is difficult. The obvious thing to do is to write it after you have finished the report.*** It is suggested that you draft it at the start of your writing so that you have got your storyline abundantly clear in your mind. You can then amend the draft when you have finished the report so that it conforms to the five principles above.

**The Introductory Chapter**

The introduction should give the reader a clear idea about

* the central issue of concern in your research and why you thought that this was worth studying.
* It should include a full statement of your research question(s) and objectives.
* If your research is based on an organisation, it is a good idea to include in this chapter some details of the organisation, such as its history, size, product and services. Note: this may be a general background to the more specific detail later on in the chapter on Method where you discuss about the research setting in conducting your research study.
* Come out with a ‘route map’ to guide the reader through the rest of the report. For example the research process.
* This chapter is usually a fairly brief but it is a vital chapter.

**The literature review**

This is a necessary activity you must do to commerce your research study.

The main purposes of the literature review are to set your study within its wider context and to show the reader how your study supplements the work that has already been done on your topic.

The literature review may inform directly any specific hypothesis that your research was designed to test. These hypotheses may also suggest a particular research approach, strategy and data collection methods. However if you are working inductively (i.e. from data to theory) your literature review may serve the purpose of illuminating and enriching your conclusions.

The title of your literature review chapter should reflect the content of the chapter. It may draw on one of the main themes in the review. It is recommended not to call it simply ‘literature review’. It may be that your literature is reviewed in more than one chapter. This would be the case, where you were using more than one body of literature in your research.

However if your literature review is only in one chapter then it is common to just say, literature review.

**The Method Chapter (The Design and Methodology Chapter)**

This chapter gives the reader sufficient information to make an estimate of the reliability and validity of your methods. The points to be included in this chapter are listed as follows:

1. Setting

* What was the research setting?
* Why did you choose that particular setting?
* What ethical issues were raised by the study and how were these addressed?

2. Participants

* How many?
* How were they selected?
* What were their characteristics?
* How were refusals/non-returns handled?

3. Materials

* What tests/scales/interview or observation schedules/questionnaires were used?
* How were purpose-made instruments developed?
* How were the resulting data analysed?

4. Procedures

* What were the characteristics of the interviewers and observers, and how were they trained?
* How valid and reliable do you think the procedures were?
* What instructions were given to participants?
* How many interviews/observations/questionnaires were there; how long did they last; where did they take place?
* When was the research carried out?

Source: Developed from Robson (2002)

**The Results Chapter**

This is the most straight forward chapter. It is reports the facts that your research discovered. This is where you will include tables and diagrams to illustrate your findings (do not put these in the appendices).

It also contains verbatim quotes from interviews or sections of narrative account that illustrate periods of unstructured observation. This is in fact a powerful way to convey the richness of your data. It is the qualitative equivalent of tables and graphs, A short verbatim quote can convey with penetrating simplicity a particularly difficult concept that you are trying to explain. Do not be afraid to capture precisely what the interviewee said. It can become a moment of most revelation and amusement.

Two important points to bear in mind when writing this chapter:

1. Stress that the purpose is to present facts (i.e. factual information) so do not offer opinions

on the facts.

2. Structure your findings in a clear, logical and easily understood manner. Examine your

objectives of your research study and let these dictate the order in which you present your

findings.

**The Conclusions Chapter**

Logically there should be a conclusion for each finding. This suggests that the conclusion chapter should be as long as the findings chapter. This is because findings do not present reflective thoughts such as opinions.

The conclusions demonstrate whether you have answered the research question and show the degree of insight that you exhibit in reaching your conclusions. This part of the research is considered to be most difficult. In fact, this is the second major opportunity in the research process to demonstrate real originality of thought (the first time being in the stage where you choose the research topic). In the conclusions you are making judgements rather than reporting facts. This is where your maturity of understanding can shine through. The key questions to ask of each of the findings are: ‘So what?’ and importantly, “To what extent have I answered my research question(s) and met my research objective(s)?’ Therefore this chapter actually requires you to reflective critically of your findings and you should give time to think and reflect to reach your conclusions.

You may find that the clearest way to present your conclusions is to follow a similar structure to the one used in your findings section (i.e. method section). If that structure reflects the research objectives then it should make certain that your conclusions would address the research question(s). Drawing up a matrix or a ‘mind map’ may help you in structuring your findings and conclusions.

An example of using a matrix in the planning of the content for the results and conclusions chapters:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Research question | Result (what factual information did I discover in relation to the specific research question?) | Conclusion (what judgement can I make about the results in relation to the specific research question?) |
| What are the operational differences between different shifts in the production plant? | Cases of indiscipline in the last six months have been twice as frequent on the night shift as on the day shift. | The night shift indiscipline problem may be due to the reluctance of operators to work on that shift. |

In the conclusions chapter, you may include ‘discussion’ as a section or place it in another chapter. Here you can ask such questions as: “What does this mean?” ‘What are the implications for organisations?’ ‘What are the implications for the current state of knowledge of the topic?’ ‘How does it add to the literature?’ ’What are the implications for future research?

Note: In this conclusion chapter no new material should be included but only in the discussion you may do so, so long it is linked to the point you are making about your conclusions.

Answering the research question(s), meeting the objectives and, if appropriate, supporting or otherwise the research hypotheses is the main purpose of the conclusions chapter. This is where you will consider the findings presented in the previous chapter. You should also return to your literature review and ask yourself ‘What do my conclusions add to the understanding of the topic displayed in the literature?

Implications – you may include practical implications to your findings in this conclusions chapter i.e. what your research implies for any future research.

Limitations – what are the limitations you face in your research study? This is probably like a confession of your weaknesses, but as a mature reflection on the degree to which your findings and conclusions can be said to be the truth.

Recommendations – this can be in your conclusions chapter or in a separate chapter., especially if you are doing an exploratory research.

References

Use the Harvard system, It is advisable to start your references at the beginning of the writing process and add to it as you go along. This is to avoid confusion with regard to the references you have made if you were to do it at the later stage.

Appendices

In general, appendices should be kept to the minimum. This is because the points you are making should be in the body of the text. If the material is ‘interesting to know’ rather than ‘essential to know’, then it can be in the appendices. However your appendices should include a blank copy of your questionnaire, interview or observation schedule.. Where these have been conducted in a language different from that in which you write your submitted project report you will need to submit both this version and the translation.

Length of the project report

You will probably have guidelines on the amount of words your project report should contain. Do stick to these.

**Organising the Project Report’s Content**

* Choosing a title

This is the part of the project report that students spend the least time. It is indeed a big mistake. According to Day (1995:1-5), a good title is one that has ‘the fewest possible words that adequately describe the content of the paper’.

* Tell a clear story

Be prepared to be asked what is your main storyline? It is the writing of the abstract (summary). It helps you to think clearly about the storyline because you have to summarise it in so few words. The format for developing the storyline is as follows:

1st step: What is my research question?

2nd step: What is the answer to my research question?

3rd step: What evidence led me to that answer?

* Helping the reader to get all the information out

*Dividing your work*

This is done by dividing the work in such a way that it is easy for the readers to find their way round it and for them always to be clear where they are, where they have come from and where they are going. You can use a matrix approach to help in developing the content in the chapter. You will see that each column of the matrix represents the broad content of a chapter. Each division may have a subdivision.

An example of using a matrix in the planning of the content for the results and conclusions chapters:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Research question | Result (what factual information did I discover in relation to the specific research question?) | Conclusion (what judgement can I make about the results in relation to the specific research question?) |
| What are the operational differences between different shifts in the production plant? | Cases of indiscipline in the last six months have been twice as frequent on the night shift as on the day shift. | The night shift indiscipline problem may be due to the reluctance of operators to work on that shift. |

*Previewing and summarising chapters*

A further way in which you can signpost your work is to ‘top and tail’ each chapter. This is to include a few words at the beginning of the chapter that provide a description of how the chapter is to contribute to answering the research question, the methods used in this part of the study, and the points that are covered.

At the end of each chapter it is useful if the reader has a brief summary of the content of the chapter. This may see, like repetition. However, it helps the reader on her or his journey through your report and ensures that you, the writer, are on the correct road.

*Tables and graphics*

Your reader will find your project report more accessible and easier to read if you present some of your data and ideas in tables and grapics. It is not only numerical data that can be presented in tables. You can also present ideas that can be easily compared.

A final note of caution: to avoid confusing your reader, do make sure that wherever possible you have introduced the table or graphic before it appears in the text.

* One report or two?

It depends who are the audiences. If for academic audience then the report has to be more complete and detail. If for the organisation’s managers then the report will be less intense like little about literature review and the development of the theory but to include the recommendations.

* Clarity and simplicity

You should write a report aiming to provide the reader with a report that she or he cannot put down until 2.00 a.m. or later for fear of spoiling the flow.

Use simple sentences as far as possible. So you need to avoid jargon and careful not to use large numbers of quotations form the literature.

* Check your spelling and grammar

You need to have your friends to check for spelling and grammar mistakes.

The ten commandments of good writing:

Day (1995:160) provides a useful checklist for those of us who make the sort of grammatical errors that threaten the credibility of our writing.

Common grammatical errors

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Often we write | The correct way is |
| 1 | Each pronoun should agree with their antecedent | Each pronoun should agree with *its* antecedent. |
| 2 | Just between you and I, case is important | Just between you and *me*, case is important. |
| 3 | A preposition is a poor word to end a sentence with | A preposition is a poor word *with which* to end a sentence. |
| 4 | Do not use no double negatives | Do not use double negatives |
| 5 | Verbs have to agree with their subject | verbs *have* to agree with their subject |
| 6 | Remember to never split an infinitive | Remember *never to split* an infinitive. |
| 7 | When dangling, do not use participles. | Do not use dangling participles. |
| 8 | Avoid clichés like the plague. | To avoid clichés like the plague! |
| 9 | Do not write a run-on sentence it is difficult when you got to punctuate it so it makes sense when the reader reads what you wrote. | Do not write a run-on sentence. It is difficult to punctuate it so that it makes sense to the reader. |
| 10 | About sentence fragments | What about sentence fragments? (!) |
| 11 | The data is included in this section. | The data are included in this section. |

* Person, tense and gender

The style of writing the research report is dictated by the method you used and in the choice of personal pronoun. The observer is independent of what is being observed and as such an *impersonal style* is more appropriate. On the other hand the researcher may be the participant observer who participates in the daily life of people under study. The researcher is an intrinsic part of the research process, and the used of the first person seems more logical here. However, style is more important. The use of the term ‘the author’ sounds too impersonal and the excessive use of ‘I’ or ‘we’ may raise questions about your ability to stand outside your data and to be objective.

Day (1995:160) identifies rules for the correct use of tense. He suggests that ‘you’ should

normally use the present tense when referring to previously published work e.g. Day

identifies and you should use the past tense when referring to your present results e.g. I

found that …..

Day (1995) and Becker (1986) champion the use of the active voice (I found that ) because it is clearer, shorter and unambiguous.

Care must be given to the use of gender-based terms. This is to avoid biasness and does not cause offence.

Preserving anonymity is important and the use of pseudonyms is necessary.

* The need for continual revision

Project reports are read by many people and they will judge your work. For this reason you need to polish your work with successive drafts until you are happy that you can do no better.

Checklist for evaluating your first draft

* Is there a clear structure?
* Is there a clear storyline?
* Does your abstract reflect accurately the whole content of the report?
* Does your introduction state clearly the research question(s) and objectives?
* Does your literature review inform the later content of the report?
* Are your methods clearly explained?
* Have you made a clear distinction between findings and conclusions in the two relevant chapters?
* Have you checked all your references and presented these in the required manner?
* Is there any text material that should be in the appendices or vice versa?
* Does your title reflect accurately your content?
* Have you divided up your text throughout with suitable headings?
* Does each chapter have a preview and a summary?
* Are you happy that your writing is clear, simple and direct?
* Have you eliminated all jargon?
* Have you eliminated all unnecessary quotations?
* Have you checked spelling and grammar?
* Have you checked for assumptions about gender?
* Is your report in a format that will be acceptable to the assessing body?

After having gone through the checklist you may decide to make the necessary amendments or corrections. Keep asking yourself ‘How easy can I make the reader’s task?’ After each successive draft do leave a space of time for your thoughts to mature. It is amazing how something you wrote a few days before will now make no sense to you. On the other hand, you may be impressed with what you have written earlier due to its clarity and simplicity and the insight of some passages.

After completing the second draft you may want to give it to your friends to read. Ask your reader to use the checklist above , to which you can add specific points that you feel are important (e.g. are my arguments well reasoned?).

Meeting the assessment criteria

Your work will be assessed against the criteria that apply to your research programme. The Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives can be used to illustrate your level that your project report should meet. At the lower level of Bloom’s taxonomy exists knowledge and comprehension of the topic covered. At the intermediate levels they should contain evidence of application and analysis. Application refers to the ability to apply certain principles and rules in particular situations. Your method section should be the principal vehicle for demonstrating application. Analysis may be illustrated by your ability to break down your data and to clarify the nature of the component parts and the relationship between them. Whatever your assessment criteria, it is certain that you will be expected to demonstrate your ability at these lower and intermediate levels.

The higher levels are synthesis and evaluation. Synthesis is the ability to arrange and assemble various elements so as to make a new statement or plan or conclusion.

Evaluation refers to the ability to judge materials or methods in terms of internal accuracy and consistency or by comparison with external criteria. You have the opportunity to show your ability in the literature review and in the awareness of the limitations of your own research. It is necessary that each of the levels of educational objectives should be demonstrated in your project report.

Oral presentation of the report

* Planning and preparing

All presentations should have clear aims and objectives.

The aim is to give the audience an overview of your report in such a way that it will capture their interest (e.g. an abstract). How much detail to go into it will be determined largely by the time at your disposal. Keep it clear and simple.

Your objectives are more specific. These should be phrased in terms of what it is you want your audience members to do after your presentation. It is a good idea to share the objectives with the audience members so that they know about the journey on which they are being taken.

An example of objectives for presentation:

* Describe the purpose of the project
* Explain the context in which the project research was set.
* Identify the research strategy adopted and the reasons for its choice.
* List the main findings, conclusions and recommendations flowing from the research.

The final point is the approach to deliver your presentation. A good idea is to involve the audience members rather than simply tell them what it is you want them to know. Asking them to ask questions throughout the presentation is a good way of ensuring that the talk is not all in one direction. You have to be careful too, to ensure that you do not let questions and answers run away with time or else you will lose your control of time. Be careful not to turn your presentation into a teaching session.

* Using visual aids

Rawlins (1993:37) says ‘I hear and forget, I see and I remember’. The use of visual aids will do more than enhance the understanding of your audience. It will help you to look better prepared and therefore more professional.

A simple set of overhead slides will perform the same function as a set of notes, in that it will ensure that you do not forget key points, and will help you to keep your presentation on track. Since you have already know the material so well that a key point noted on the overhead will be enough to trigger your thought process and focus the attention of the audience. Key points also ensure that you do not have to read the script but to keep the attention of the audience.

Using the white board is actually to supplement your pre-prepared slides. It provides a means to explain further of your points.

* Making the presentation

If you have prepared your presentation and practised it, you will have the confidence although you may feel nervous. You can try your presentation to a friend to ensure that it flows smoothly.

You can use Parry’s ‘three-step’ rule:

1. First tell them what I am going to say;

2. then I say to them;

3. then I tell them what I’ve said’.

Audience like to know where they are going, they like to know how they are progressing on the journey, and they like to know when they have arrived.

Finally some practical points that will help:

* Think about whether you would prefer to sit or stand at the presentation. The former may be better to foster debate, the latter is likely to give you a sense of control. Which you choose may depend upon the circumstances of the presentation, including the approach you wish to adopt, the room layout, the equipment you are using and your preferred style.
* Consider how you will deal with difficult questions. Rehearse these and your answers in your mind so that you can deal with them confidently during the presentation.
* Avoid jargon.
* Check the room before the presentation to ensure you have everything you need, you are happy and familiar with the layout, and all your equipment is working.