# How to write an executive summary

There is no one way to write an executive summary and many sources will give different templates and suggestions. For students, here is a recommended structure.

## What is an executive summary?

An executive summary is one paragraph (preferably) placed at the start of a report that summarises the report contents. The summary should include a statement about the purpose of the report, state the intended audience for the report, give an overview of the report contents, and state any final conclusions or recommendations made within the report. The executive summary is brief because busy executives, managers, colleagues, employees, investors, and other stakeholders, do not want to read the whole document to understand the contents and the recommended outcomes. For those who need to read the contents in detail, the executive summary is also useful because it provides an overview of the contents.

## A suggested format for an executive summary.

State the purpose of the report in one sentence. Do not rely on the title of the report to convey the purpose of the report. Start this statement with: “This report ….”

State the audience for the report. That is, state who is likely to read it, for example, if the report is a cost-benefit analysis then a manager might want to read it, if the report is a requirements document then a customer or product owner or project stakeholder or member of the development team might want to read it. If it is a document containing system models then a project manager, developer, product owner or analyst might want to read it. Some reports are for the general public but other reports are highly specialised so this information is useful for the potential reader. Start with this statement: “The audience for this report is…”.

Summarise the contents. This can be a summary of the main sections in the report. Start with this statement “This report contains…”

State the recommended outcomes or final conclusion of the report. This is only needed when the report is a business case, is comparing options, is recommending one best option, makes some other specific finding, or recommends some specific action. Otherwise, leave this statement out. Start with: “This report/ study/ investigation/ business case / requirements analysis….recommends.

## What follows an executive summary

For a report with multiple sections, it is a good idea to insert a Table of Contents immediately following the executive summary.

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