REPORT WRITING FOR BUSINESS STUDIES

Mohan Dhall & Len Nixon

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PUBLICATION

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Report Writing for Business Studies

Introduction

Report writing is a skill that should be mastered by all Business Studies students. Application of the skills and techniques shown in this book should enable all students to successfully structure business reports.

In the NSW Board of Studies Business Studies course each student is expected to learn the skill of report writing. It can be applied in the Preliminary course for a structured response to the business investigation. In the HSC examination, it is used to answer questions in section III. The techniques shown here could also be applied and adapted to suit the extended response (Section IV) in the HSC examination.

There is a bias in this book towards report writing for HSC students. Hence each of the questions in this book is based on HSC course content. Despite this, Preliminary course students are also encouraged to make use of the material. The examples shown largely utilise content that is also covered in the Preliminary course. The main thing for students to see is the visual layout, integration of business terminology, use of tables, charts, diagrams and other structural tools.

This organisation of the book is as follows:

- Chapter 1 introduces the main principles of report writing, the structural tools to be used, the terms encounterd in typical questions, and the strategies to be adopted in answering questions.
- Chapter 2 provides instruction on how to write a business report
- Chapters 3,4 and 5 presents three alternative style of business report writing: i.e. Conservative, Key Point and Holistic report writing styles. The key features of each style are defined and discussed. The different styles of Report are then used to provide a model answer to the same (typical) HSC question.
- Chapter 7 provides model answers to the questions in Chapter 6

It should be appreciated that the "model" answers are simply that. A student will develop his or her own style of report writing and all of the questions may be answered in a different but still acceptable manner. The final result will depend on your choice of style as well as your analysis of the material under study.

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Mohan Dhall and Len Nixon
Sydney, 2001

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Chapter 1 Business Reports

Overview

One of the key skills to be mastered for the new HSC and Preliminary Courses in Business Studies is the ability to write well-structured business reports. In Section III of the HSC paper a student has about 36 minutes in which to write a business report.

The business report will need to **integrate** two or three of the five HSC topic areas together. Those topics **NOT** covered in this Section will be covered in Section IV (the external response part) of the paper.

Learning to write business reports takes some effort, as the skills can be hard to master. Initially you should practise writing draft reports: This will help you to settle on a suitable style.

What is a business report?

A business report is a planned and ordered response to an inquiry or a series of questions posed on an actual or hypothetical business. It is a **structured** response that addresses each aspect of the inquiry or question. Business reports should be set out in a way that helps convey important information in a format that makes it easy to understand.

Structuring of business reports is very important as you have only a limited time in which to provide a lot of information. You need to be careful to give **relevant** information. It is important to keep all aspects of the question in mind as they prepare and execute your response.

Business reports should be written in a clear and direct style using some, or all, of the following structural tools:

Structural Tools

- **Headings**
- **Margins**
- **Diagrams and Sketches**
- **Tables**
- **Graphs and Charts**
- **Statistics**
- **Industry and/or business specific terminology**
- **Case Study references**

Figure 1: Tools required in business report writing

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Business reports that incorporate the use of the structural tools listed will enable you to convey a large amount of information efficiently.

When writing business reports remember:

- The report must keep focused on the information that it is intended to deliver
- The report should be tailored to suit the user of the report (e.g. a report written to the managers will be **different** to one written to other key stakeholders)
- Keep the report to the point: don't waffle or just rewrite the question
- Use terminology appropriate to the business(es) and the industry
- Ensure that any graphs, tables, diagrams and statistics used are integrated into the report, are relevant and, where appropriate, properly labelled

What is to be included in a report?

All reports are written in order to convey information. Effective business report writing is about delivering the information required in a format that enables it to be quickly and easily understood.

Reports will vary depending on the depth and breadth of information sought and for what reason it is required.

Thus you need to know how to **pitch** the report so it delivers an appropriate level of detail whilst answering the question in full. Some reports, for example, require a great breadth of basic information; others may require a detail analysis of trends over time whilst still others may seek recommendation to be made following an approval.

It is crucial then to quickly ascertain what level of detail is being demanded by the question. Different stem words should elicit a different level of response so students must familiarise themselves with each of the following directives:

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	A hierarchy of key terms*	Bloom's taxonomy
"Hardest" Requires an analysis of a set of factors, an understanding of the limitations of these and an ability to make astute recommendations	**Argue, appraise, assess, evaluate, critically analyse, justify, critically judge, recommend**	**Evaluation**
	Propose, design, predict, devise, suggest, develop, plan, modify, reason	**Synthesis**
"Median Difficulty" Requires a student to be able to state why certain things are happening in a business, to describe and explain them	**Compare, contrast, analyse, deduce, classify, investigate, select**	**Analysis**
	Calculate, describe, explain, examine, account for, show, prove	**Application**
"Easiest" Requires a basic understanding of business, requires a person to identify and recall factors but no analysis of trends or any deeper appraisal required	**Outline, delineate, divide**	**Comprehension**
	List, recall, define, state, identify, recognise, name, label, locate, place	**Knowledge**

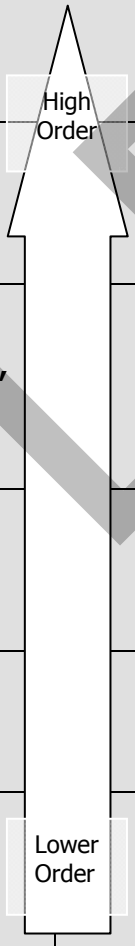


Figure 2: Hierarchy of terms found in business report questions
***for a full list of key term see Appendix I page 77**

Note:
Evaluation equals analysis and judgement (i.e. the ability to synthesise information and decide between competing alternatives.)

Whilst evaluation is the highest order skill in the taxonomy it can be taught. Students can develop the capacity to evaluate when they are aware of the goals and intentions of businesses. Since business priorities are never met in a predictable way students must ask the difficult question, "Why?" from here begins synthesis, connected reasoning and the start of evaluation.

If a student is asked to critically assess a business's problems then the level of detail required would be much greater than if they were asked to describe or explain the same situation. In the same way, very low order prompts such as list or identify should require only a brief (but accurate) response.

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Summary

Preliminary Course Reports

For the Preliminary Course, students may have many months allocated to undertake the business investigation or small business plan. Using a structural approach to either task helps to break down the work into sizeable 'chunks' and also enables students to quickly see what information they have already obtained and what it is that they still need to do.

HSC Report Writing

When an HSC student first reads the question they should underline the key directional terms and then use these to assist in both structuring and weighting their report. They can use directional terms also to help assist in the allocation of the time they have in which to answer the question. In a 36 minute response about half the time (i.e. 18 minutes) would be spent on addressing the highest order parts of the question, about 10-12 minutes on medium difficulty directives and only about 5 minutes or so on low order directives.

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