

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Use to make summarized recommendations for a project to a company/ supervisor

WHAT IS AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY?

An executive summary is a brief, condensed version of a report addressed to managers. Most managers only need a basic understanding of the projects being undertaken and how they fit together. The executive summary functions by explaining, in a very concise manner, how the recommendations in the full report can benefit the particular organization.

HOW LONG SHOULD AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY BE?

A good executive summary should usually be between 5-10% of the length of the completed report (for a report that is 20 pages or less, aim for a one page executive summary).

WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONTAIN?

Executive summaries usually present information in two parts:

- **Background:** Explain the problem or opportunity. What was not working? What was not working as effectively as it should have? What potential modification of a procedure or product was analyzed?
- **Major Findings and Implications:** Here you might include a brief description of the methods, followed by a more detailed explanation about the findings and suggested changes.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Use Specific Evidence:** Most managers are concerned with “the bottom line,” so use data to support your claims about the changes you are proposing.
- **Be Specific in Describing the Research:** Use data to support your claims, and stay focused on the potential benefits of implementing the proposed changes. Don’t give your reader the opportunity to ask, “How do you know?”
- **Describe your Methods Briefly:** Only if you think your readers will be interested; limit this to 1-2 sentences.
- **Describe the Findings According to your Audience’s Needs:** Do your readers want to know about your results? Will they be able to understand your technical data? (Or will they even be interested in it?) Should you go directly to your conclusions and recommendations? It is crucial to know your audience.
- **Get Feedback on your Draft from an Outside Reviewer:** Someone with no connection to your project will be the best reader. If that person can read your executive summary and articulate to you what the project is and how it will benefit the organization, you know you are on the right track.

REVIEWING AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Whether you are editing your own summary or reading someone else’s, ask yourself these questions about the piece:

1. How clearly does the writer explain the background? Can you explain the problem or opportunity being described after reading this executive summary?
2. Does the writer discuss the methods? Can you explain what the methods are after reading this executive summary?
3. How clearly has the writer explained the benefits to the organization? Can you identify the findings: results, conclusions, recommendations?