MA 558 Report Writing

Any substantial consulting project should be documented with a report written by the consultant and presented to the client. For both the consultant and client, the report serves as documentary evidence of what was done. For the client, the report explains what was done and what conclusions the consultant feels can be drawn. For the consultant, the report can serve as documentation of his/her work, and as a defense and justification should questions later arise as a result of (mis)use of the results obtained.

Writing Style

Keep the writing style simple and clear. Say what you need to say as briefly as possible. Use technical terms if necessary, but remember your audience: you may need to explain the terms you use. Do not talk down to the client.

Report Format

All reports should contain sections on problem description, data generation, analysis and conclusions. Whenever practical, the consultant should attempt to accommodate client needs in terms of report format.

In the absence of a client-requested format, I will require the following format for all reports. This means the report must consist of exactly these sections in exactly this order.

1. Executive Summary A one or two page summary of the problem, data generation method, analysis and conclusions. Strive for conciseness, accuracy and content. The executive summary is a brief summary of the rest of the report designed to give the essence of the report without the details.

2. Problem Description What questions does the study seek to answer? Include any relevant background.

3. Data Generation How were the data generated, and why were they generated this way? You should address such issues as sampling design and treatment assignment.

4. Materials and Methods This section explains the statistical methods used in analyzing the data. Initial data exploration should be discussed. Specific models and analysis methods should be described in some detail. Indicate how necessary assumptions were checked.

5. Results State what was found, in a simple, clear manner. Interpret results as they are reported. Support your narrative with clearly-labeled and referenced graphs and tables.

6. Conclusions Summarize main findings and perhaps recommend actions or follow-up experiments. Relate the conclusions to the key questions posed in the problem description.

7. Appendices Appendices are for technical details that you don’t want to include in the main report. Use them sparingly and always with good reason.