

# How to write the perfectly bad report

Jim Haney  
Myun W. Lee

## 1. The Title

Make sure that the title of your report is meaningless. You can do that simply by using long, technical words in semi-random order. To check on whether your title is good enough, try it out on some colleagues. If it completely baffles and frustrates them, you have the little problem solved.

## 2. Overall Structure

Avoid structure. Don't organize your text into parts or sections.

The trick here is to avoid making an outline, or thinking about an outline, or looking at any outline someone else may have constructed. Just write 200 pages of detailed statement, and don't worry about order, parts, pieces, and sequences. Thoughts like that are occasions of sin. Be firm. Be strong. If a colleague suggests that you make up an outline, tell him that your report-writing technique is none of his cotton-picking business.

## 3. Headings

Don't avoid the use of headings, because that can discourage a reader from even trying to read your report. You don't want to frighten him

off; you want him to try to read it. So, you can frustrate him completely. After all, rage springs not from indifference but from dashed hope. So, here is what you do; sprinkle some headings throughout your text at random intervals. And use some terms that offer definite promise –as, for example, SUMMARY, INTRODUCTION, METHODS, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS. Those headings will encourage a reader, raise his spirits, and beckon him on. Then, he will discover that they mean absolutely nothing. This is an effective technique. It drives reader right up the wall.

#### 4. Paragraphing

As you are writing the draft, begin a new paragraph every page or two. Some authorities on that writing argue against having any paragraphing. But, again, that's simplistic drop in a paragraph indentation once in a while to make the reader assume the cluster of sentences has some coherent meaning. He will find out soon enough that he has been tricked, and his blood pressure will jump 30 points. If you slip up and begin a paragraph with a sentence that's general enough in meaning to sound like a topic sentence, don't worry. You will have the reader right where you want him.

#### 5. Sentence Structures

Do not use any simple declarative sentences at all. They're much too clear and easy to read. Try for a least three clauses and 60 words in

each sentences. And use the passive voice, so that the reader has to keep four or five concepts mentally suspended until he finds the verb. If you will also take a little care to scramble the syntax and use misleading conjunctions, you can punish a reader severely. But check your work. After you have written a page, read it over. If it is understandable, go back over it and delete the verbs from every other sentence. Then, you see if any reader claims he understands what you have written, you know damn well he is a liar.

## 6. Words

Never use a short word or simple phrase if you can help it. Use the longest and most abstract words you can find I know this takes effort, but the result is worth it. The reader will have to work ten times as hard at deciphering your meanings. And he will never be precisely sure what you mean. That's your objective- that grand uncertainty. It can induce nausea in even the toughest of readers.

## 7. Punctuation

Do not overlook these nasty little weapons, they are great for driving a reader nuts. Just put the right mark in the wrong place, the wrong mark in right place, or – and this is the nastiest – the wrong mark in the wrong place. If you do not want to be systematic, then just pick random spots by closing your eyes and dropping your pen on the paper. The beauty of mispunctuation is that just about any technique

works, particularly with highly skilled, sensitive, fast reader. It drives them to despair.

#### 8. Tables and Figures

Put some of these in your report, but do not refer to them in the text. For titles and captions, use cryptic technical phrases. Include enough information to attract the reader, but withhold some crucial element. After the reader has inspected the display closely, he will discover that it is almost meaningful, but not quite. This is a great technique for inducing anger in a reader, no matter how sweet and calm a disposition he might have.

#### 9. Techniques for Fogging Conclusions

You can spin out massive quantities of detail about a study as long as you avoid making any clear statement about its purpose and findings. In some way, if you have been maneuvered into including some statements on those two things, do not be discouraged. Merely add some statements that obliquely contradict or otherwise cast doubt upon the earlier statements. If you take care with your paragraphing and sentence structures (see point 4 to 5), you can fog over your foggy conclusions with equally foggy contradictory statements that will leave your readers not only deeply perplexed but downright dizzy. So there you have it nine simple little principles. And they work beautifully. Almost all authors use some of them, and some authors

use almost all of them. But you can do better than that. By taking a little care and applying all of these principles, you can turn out a report that is completely, absolutely, perfectly bad. So, if you want to make a name of your self, just get on out there and do it.