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Tips for Writing Up Results

Tip #1: Have a clear and consistent outline

Although reports can be amended to best fit your audience, a standard evaluation report (in full) tends to include:

- Cover page
- Executive summary
- Background information about the program
- Evaluation or Assessment Design
 - Purpose
 - Design
 - Instrument & data collection
- Results
- Discussion of results
- Conclusions, recommendations

(Morris, Fitz-Gibbon, & Freeman, 1987)

Tip #2: Make your report understandable

Evaluation reports should clearly describe the program being evaluated, including its context, and the purposes, procedures, and findings of the evaluation, so that essential information is provided and easily understood

- Not everyone knows the difference between a T-test, a Z-test, and an F-test. Write your assessment findings in plain English and reserve the statistics for a technical report or appendix
- Consider use of separate summary and technical reports, targeting reports to client and other stakeholders
- Provide sufficient contextual information
- Use technical language sparingly and if you need to use them make sure they are defined
- Support summary statements with clear discussions of related problems
- Have someone from the intended audience read the report BEFORE you make it public

(adapted from Standard U5: Report Clarity, Joint Committee, 1994)

Tip #3: Remember who you are talking to:

What's key to writing up results? "Audience, Audience, Audience!"

- Keep the audience/client in mind. Ask yourself....
 - To what extent is the information:
 - Practical
 - Relevant
 - Useful
 - Credible
 - Understandable?
- Give the client what s/he needs, but no more
- Imagine you are writing to the audience
- Follow-up: Have meeting to discuss report

Tip #4: Different strokes for different folks:

Different people want to hear different things, so consider writing at least three reports:

- one for your key external stakeholders
- a shorter version for administrators
- an internal report for use in ongoing assessment

Tip #5: Keep it simple

Make it easy for the reader. Good reports read like stories, not like VCR instructions.

- Present an attractive report tailored to style of the audience
- Start sections with the big idea
- Use descriptive sub-headers
- Use graphics
- Use short paragraphs and sentences

Tip #6: Stay Objective

Reporting procedure should guard against distortion caused by personal feelings and biases of any party to the evaluation, so that evaluation reports fairly reflect evaluation findings.

- List authors and editors of report openly
- Seek out and report alternative conclusions
- Remember, when reporting assessment results what you don't find is often just as interesting as what you do find
- Strive to maintain independence in reporting

(adapted from Standard A11: Impartial Reporting, Joint Committee, 1994)

Tip #7: Don't forget the polish

- Presentation is everything so don't forget the following: (Fenn Buderer, 2000):
 - Tone: "write tactfully, respectfully, and non-judgmentally" (pg. 5)
 - Professionalism: use proper grammar, make sure there are no errors
 - Language: write simply, but accurately
 - Style: write scientifically, not socially

Tip #8: Get the word out on time

Report timeliness and dissemination is critical to the success of any report. For results to be meaningful, they must mean something to the people who receive them, *at the time that they receive them.*

Tip #9: Share what you learned

There are usually many different people that are interested in your results. Beyond your initial stakeholders, share what you learned with anyone who may be interested.

- When reporting results, don't forget about students; they are often just as interested to know about the effectiveness of programs as the student affairs administrators who run them
- Websites with findings from your project helps spread the word faster
- Faculty often are interested in learning about students and applying it to their work

Tip #10: Peer Review

Have someone read over your report and give you feedback before you make your results public, they should be reading for content, clarity as well as grammar.

References:

Fenn Buderer, N. (2000, Spring). Written communication skills for consulting statisticians: Creating a collaborative environment with clients. *The statistical Consultant*, 17(1), 5-10.

Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluations, The (1994). *The Program Evaluation Standards: How to Assess Evaluations of Educational Programs*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Morris, L.L., Fitz-Gibbon, C.T., & Freeman, M.E. (1987). *How to communicate evaluation findings*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.