

WRITING AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The executive summary is a comprehensive restatement of a project, highlighting its most integral parts. Its purpose is to consolidate in one place the principal parts of the project. An accurate executive summary contains sufficient detail to reflect the contents of the project, but is concise enough for the reader to understand the main ideas without having to read it in its entirety. Since executives make financial, personnel, training, and/or policy decisions based on information they receive, the executive summary should be well written and accurately condensed. To ensure a successful executive summary, keep these writing guidelines in mind.

THE LENGTH

Executive summaries are typically one page long, or 10% of the original document, 1.5 or 2.0 spacing within margins. They usually do not surpass 2 pages.

If the first writing of the summary is too long to present all the information, determine the most important ideas being conveyed and focus on these ideas with supporting details.

PLANNING AND DRAFTING THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Emphasize the focus of the project as the key to distilling information in the summary. Look at figures, charts and titles to find related information.

Think critically and strategically to decide what content is important to the audience and what information should be included in the summary.

Combine information from multiple sources that contribute to the main idea of the project to determine paragraph categories in the summary.

Choose outlining as an effective way of structuring your executive summary before writing.

Include a beginning, middle, and end in your outline, with one step flowing smoothly to the next without omitting important details.

Identify the major parts of the project and emphasize key points by placing them in positions of importance in the summary.



ORGANIZATION OF THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organize the ideas in your executive summary. Various ways include: sequential, chronological, increasing or decreasing order of importance, specific to general, or general to specific, or division and classification.

Choose the method that best suits the subject, reader, and purpose of the project.

Use your organizational project structure as an outline for the executive summary.

CONCISENESS AND CLARITY

Get right to the point and be concise when writing your executive summaries.

Summarize the project in the first paragraph, as though you had only one paragraph to do so, and then use the rest of the summary to support and explain the first paragraph.

Avoid repetition of ideas, words, and sentences.

CONVENTIONS TO FOLLOW

Follow the specific conventions of writing executive summaries.

Do not include a concluding paragraph since executive summaries are summaries.

Also avoid putting in personal evaluations or comments.

Write the summary as though the reader will not read the entire document to ensure that you condense your material accurately and that your reader understands the focus of your project.

Be sure to explain words or concepts with which the reader might be unfamiliar.

TIPS FOR WRITING THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Match the executive summary to your audience, your business, and your desired project outcomes.

Write a concise, clear, and relevant summary of your project to gain buy-in from your readers.

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