

Tips on 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, it is crucial that the executive summary be well written and accurately condensed.

To ensure a successful executive summary keep these writing tips in mind:

- Executive summaries are typically one page long, or 10% of the original document, double-spaced and within margins. If the original is too long to present all the information, determine the most important ideas being conveyed and focus on these with supporting details.
- The focus of the project is the key to distilling information. Look at figures, charts and titles to find related information. Combine information from multiple sources that contribute to the main idea of the project. Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information in the document, visual displays and appendices. Ask yourself whether you have all the important information and explanations necessary to finishing the project on time. If not, obtain the missing information before writing your executive summary.
- Outlining is an effective way of structuring your summary before writing. The outline should include a beginning, middle and end, with one step flowing smoothly to the next without omitting important information. Identify the major parts of the project and emphasize key points by placing them in positions of importance. Divide the project into logical parts and break the tasks into manageable parts.
- Project information may be organized in various ways including: 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 structure as an outline for the executive summary.
- Executive summaries get right to the point. In the first paragraph summarize the project as though you had only paragraph to do so, and then use the rest of the paper to support and explain the first paragraph. Avoid repetition of ideas, words and sentences.
- Executive summaries follow specific conventions. Since they are summaries, do not include a summary paragraph. Also avoid putting in personal evaluations or comments. Write the summary as though the reader will not read the entire document to will ensure that you condense your material accurately and that your reader understands the focus of your project. Be sure to explain words or concepts that the reader might be unfamiliar with.