

Short Reports

The Technical Highlights Report, Technical Memorandum/Letter Report, and Progress Report

A Brief Overview of Short Reports

All writing in engineering should convey information in an objective, fact-based manner that is not biased by individual perspectives or personal interests. This style of writing ensures that scientific and technical information is clearly relayed from you to your audience.

The different types of technical reports required within the field of engineering and in courses at Grand Valley are the Technical Highlights Report, Technical Memorandum/Letter Report, and Progress Report. All three reports are short and concisely worded to convey technical information to different professional audiences. The purpose of these shorter reports is for you to communicate ideas, results, or present options to professionals in the field. Each report is shorter than the full technical report but is meant to acquaint students with the type of real-life writing they will face in the field of engineering. In the field, short reports are often written to update supervisors on a project. All technical reports are intended to convey technical information clearly and concisely, and all adhere to the same basic guidelines for engineering writing.

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Audience

While your professor will read and grade the report, you should imagine an audience of professional engineers, as short reports are common in the field, and the reason you are assigned to write them is to practice this important communication strategy. Assume your audience is educated with a technical or engineering background but requires updates and further information regarding the progress or research you have accomplished on a specific project.

Components of Short Reports

Refer to your professor's assignment sheet frequently for clarification regarding the exact information your report should include. In general, however, short reports are organized around the following ideas:

Technical Highlights Report

Potential readers are middle and upper management within your organization. These reports:

- Communicate significant technical accomplishments, events, or results.
- Include the potential value or impact for the customer or company.
- Are 80 words or less.
- Are meant to report technical activities.

Refer to your professor's assignment sheet frequently for clarification regarding the exact information your report should include.

Technical Memorandum or Letter Report

Potential readers are middle and upper management within your organization. These reports:

- Give results of small-scale evaluations or consulting jobs.
- Inform readers of new courses of action and make recommendations for new actions.
- Present options for future work.
- Request direction from customers.
- Usually consist of a one- or two-page letter.

Progress Report

Potential readers are technical peers, managers, and decision-makers within manufacturing. These reports:

- Include a review of results and planned activities for completion of the study/project.
- Disseminate technically significant information on recently completed work on an ongoing project.
- Should be organized similarly to the full technical report. See the Full Technical Report guide at our website: <http://www.gvsu.edu/wc>.
- Should be a two- to four-page summary of the current state of the study.

Although shorter than full technical reports, all three reports described above should be written in a formal, professional tone. These reports are product-driven; unclear descriptions of work accomplished or future options can impede future progress. Therefore, great care should be taken to write clearly, to include all necessary information, and to state all results and recommendations in an objective manner. Results and recommendations should be stated objectively.

Prompts for Writing Consultations

- Is the writing formatted according to the assignment's description?
- Does the *Technical Highlights Report* communicate significant technical accomplishments, events or results? Does it present the potential value of a project or impact for the customer?
- Does the *Technical Memorandum or Letter Report* give results on a project, inform readers of new courses of action or recommendations, present options for future work, request direction, or communicate results?
- Does the *Progress Report* present the current state of a study and provide technically significant information on completed work?
- Is the report within the format and length specifications of the assignment? Is it brief and concise to the point?
- Does every sentence seem to count?
- Is the paper free of colloquialisms, jargon, and unprofessional wording?
- Are phrases direct and to the point? Is the paper free of most adverbs and adjectives?

Take Notice of Voice/ Tone

- Stay objective: no judgments or “I think,” “I feel.”
- Use passive voice, as that takes the emphasis off you, the writer, and places it on actions that were completed. For help distinguishing between active and passive voice, see the Active and Passive Voice handout at our website: <http://www.gvsu.edu/wc>.
- Use third person. Only on rare and necessary occasions should you refer to yourself in the writing.
- State clear facts precisely, avoiding flowery language such as excessive adjectives and adverbs.

Short reports are organized similarly to a full technical report. See the Full Technical Report guide at www.gvsu.edu/wc.