How to Prepare a Final Report

Final reports are frequently requested from funding agencies to assess progress. In many cases, they can determine whether you will be refunded or receive funding in the future. Final reports are also a helpful way to summarize your data and thoughts and can form the basis of a subsequent manuscript submitted for peer review.

The report must be well organized, clearly written, and formulated to make a story. Be certain that what you did and what resulted is clear. Your advisor, Dr. Zier or Dr. Wyatt can help you with any questions you have.

Use the general outline of a paper to be submitted for peer review. You have to tell the reader what your aims were, why the study was important, and specifically how you accomplished your aims. Most final reports should have a 10 page length, depending upon the situation, but please consult the specific program guidelines to be sure. No matter what the length, be succinct, clear, and focused. Work with your mentor and have him/her read your drafts. You’ll learn a lot from the feedback you get.

Formatting Instructions

**Font:** Use an Arial, Helvetica, Palatino Linotype, or Georgia typeface, a black font color, and a font size of 11 points or larger. (A Symbol font may be used to insert Greek letters or special characters; the font size requirement still applies.)

**Page Margins:** Use standard paper size (8 ½” x 11). Use one inch margins (top, bottom, left, and right) for all pages.

**Figures, Graphs, Diagrams, Charts, Tables, Figure Legends, and Footnotes:** You may use a smaller type size but it must be in a black font color, readily legible, and follow the font typeface requirement. Color can be used in figures; however, all text must be in a black font color, clear and legible.

Structure of the Final Report:

**Cover Page** - Include your name, your mentor’s name, the title of the project, the institution and department where the project was carried out. The title should let the reader clearly know what the study concerns.

**Abstract** - A brief summary, 250 words, of the goals of the project, the methods used, the most important findings, and the conclusions.
**Introduction/Background:** What question did you ask or which hypothesis did you test, what is known in the literature about the problem, and which published studies have led you to formulate your hypotheses or select the question you asked? This is an opportunity to explain why your work is important, interesting, and how the project relates to other problems or areas of medicine.

**Materials and Methods:** Describe the principle methods you have used to test your hypothesis or answer the question you asked, each in a separate section. The nature of the methods will vary, depending upon the type of study. Discuss this with your mentor to determine which methods are appropriate to include. Detail should be sufficient for someone to judge whether they are appropriate for the study and to repeat your work to validate the results. This is where you mention that you had IRB or IACUC approval and anything about informed consent of subjects, if this was a clinical study involving human participation.

**Results:** Divide your study into sections, each with an informative title, you are telling a story in this section. Start at the beginning and proceed logically through the development of the project. Select carefully what to include. You don’t need to show everything you’ve done. Prepare tables or figures to present the results discussed in each section. Indicate where the figure/table belongs in parentheses and then place figures and tables at the end of the manuscript. The results section is a factual presentation of what you did. Your interpretation of the findings comes in the discussion.

**Discussion:** Here you get the chance to talk about what you think is the significance and implications of your work. Begin by briefly summarizing the study. Then discuss in more detail what the results mean, whether they support your original hypothesis, and possible future directions for the project, even if you won’t be continuing the project. It’s very valuable for you to think about where your project could go. If there were surprises or stumbling blocks, you could discuss the reasons here and how you might solve them in the future. End with a concise conclusion, which is the take home message.

**References:** Reference all literature cited. Unless the program’s instructions say otherwise, use any format you find in the literature.

**Acknowledgements:** It’s appropriate to thank anyone who helped you, but wouldn’t earn an authorship on a resulting manuscript. This could be someone who helped in a purely technical manner or a colleague who read the manuscript and gave you feedback.