WEBS6203 Example reports

What is the difference between a report and an essay?

Table: Key differences between essays and reports
This list is not exhaustive but provides a set of key differences

	Essay	Report
Visually	• A continuous piece of text structured with sentences and paragraphs. • Headings to sections are optional	• A structured piece of text which is divided into clear sections with headings and sub headings • Each section or sub section contains text structured in sentences and paragraphs • Information may also be presented in a visual form such as tables, graphs and figures
Purpose	• To explore and discuss a topic and present the authors views or conclusions • Aimed at an audience who are already familiar with the key debate in the area	• To make a critical analysis of a topic and produce a practical set of recommendations of future • Aimed at a wide audience some of whom may not already be familiar with the area
Content	• Focusses on ideas and opinions	• Focuses on evidence (from data analysis, experiments or observations) • Presents and summarises findings of practical research
Purpose	• To demonstrate your understanding of a topic	• To demonstrate an understanding of a topic based on evidence gathered and critiqued
Primary academic requirement	• To meet the specifications set by the assessor	• To meet the specifications set by the assessor
Content	• Informal structure • There is typically an introductory paragraph, a body of argument, some conclusions	• Formal structure - may include appendices • There is an abstract and keywords (academic and technical reports) or an executive summary (business reports) • Table of contents, list of figures and tables • Introduction • Some further sections form the body of the report and explain the methods employed and present the evidence collected • A discussion of the evidence • Some conclusions and recommendations
Style	• May be more or less formal, can be exploratory. The author chooses their own voice	• Are typically written in formal language. The style has a specific practical purpose (which results in a set of recommendations)
Key strengths	• Strength of the logical argument	• The strength of the logical argument coupled with or based upon on evidence presented • Demonstration of clear understanding of existing (relevant) research
Conclusion	• Recapitulates the argument	• Recapitulated key points in the argument and makes a set of recommendations

Exercise
Broaden and internalise your understanding of the differences between essays and reports by using the references cited at the end of this section.

Skim through the documents cited and identify the key components of a report which you would not expect to find in an essay, so that you would be able to explain the differences to another person.

You may also find useful models of potential approaches to saving words by using tables, graphs and figures to illustrate your report and support your argument.

Follow up exercise
Search the web to find a set of example reports which you consider to be authoritative and generally relevant to web science and the topic of your report.

Example essays and reports for comparison

Essays
Orwell's collected essays are a classic example.

Orwell, G. (n.d.) Collected Essays. [Online]. Available at: https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/o/orwell/george/o79e/ (Accessed: 31 October 2018).
More recent equivalents can be found in publications such as the London Review of Books[1]

Ramalingam and Bound edited a 'report' which is actually a modern set of essays, some of which contain diagrams, but all of which follow the basic essay form.

Ramalingam, B. and Bound, K. 2016, Innovation for International Development, NESTA, https://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/innovation-international-development
Similarly, what is commonly referred to as a report, compiled for a government department, makes a claim to be an essay on its title page

Barber, M., Katelyn, D. and Saad, R. (2013) *An avalanche is coming* p.77. http://www.avalancheiscoming.com/

Reports
A selection of reports all of which include examples of good practice. None of which are identical in their structure and format. They are worth reviewing to help you decide

Adams, J., Loach, T. and Szomszor, M. (2016) Interdisciplinary research: Methodologies for identification and assessment. London, United Kingdom: Digital Science.
Becker, S.A., Cummins, M., Davis, A., Freeman, A., et al. (2017) NMC horizon report: 2017 higher education edition
Gleed, A. and Marchant, D. (2016) Interdisciplinarity: Survey report for the Global Research Council 2016 annual meeting. Stockport, UK: djs research.
Pan, L. and Katrenko, S. (2015) A review of the UK's interdisciplinary research using a citation based approach. Bristol, United Kingdom: HEFCE.
Sclater, N., Peasgood, A. and Mullan, J. (2016) Learning analytics in higher education [Online]. p.2017. Available at: https://www.jisc.ac.uk/reports/learning-analytics-in-higher-education
Wernli, D. and Darbellay, F. (2016) Interdisciplinarity and the 21st century research-intensive university, League of European Research Universities (LERU)

Other relevant references
A short article in Nature News which is interesting and shows good use of graphics

Van Noorden, R. (2015) Interdisciplinary research by the numbers. Nature News. [Online] 525 (7569), 306. Available at: doi:10.1038/525306a (Accessed: 31 October 2018).

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[1] https://www.lrb.co.uk/

WEBS6203 What is an extended abstract?

	Abstract	Extended abstract
Length	Specified according to the document publisher but typically 200-500 words At the university of Southampton a PhD thesis abstract is specified to be no more than one page	Specified according to the document publisher but typically specified in page length; between two and four pages
Purpose	To provide an easily understandable summary of the contents of the document which will follow	To provide a short overview of a piece of work or proposal
References	No references are cite in an abstract	A short set of references are cited and listed
Graphs, figures and tables	No graphs, figures and tables appear in an abstract	Graphs, figures and tables may be included in and extended abstract
Content	An abstract has four of five key parts: context; problem statement; method/ proposed method; contributions and key findings or focus of analysis and investigation	The extended abstract consists of the same basic parts but the additional space allows for a more detailed explanation of each component part explaining the scope and scale of the problem are a particularly important aspect of an extended abstract

Class Exercise

Stage 1 - 4x2 minutes for each partner (16 minutes total)
Working in pairs, take turns in explaining each of the four sections of your existing abstract to your partner.

Make a note, of the points you have had to make to help clarify their understanding.

As you go through this process make sure you tell them about key publications which you think are important to your argument. Why do you think they are important?

Sketch out any ideas you have for diagrams which you think will make the explanatory process of your proposed structure more clear.

Stage II 2 minutes per person (24 minutes total)
Taking turns around the class each of the partners will explain very briefly the title and the focus of their partners' proposed work

After the class

Stage III
Working from the notes you have made, revise and expand your existing abstract into an extended abstract.

 You may find it useful to read or work through the more detailed guidance of how you can work individually to expand your existing abstract.

Moving from abstract to extended abstract via automatic note taking

This exercise is designed to help you be reductive while you read for a literature review. It is aimed at helping create an extended abstract for a work in progress

The Task:
Stage 1 - Write the abstract (hopefully your have already done this).

Keeping the abstract intact as a reference point, now create a new document.

Combine the preliminary research into your chosen topic area with some additional research prompted by thoughts and ideas as you grow to understand your area under investigation.

As your read the papers, or skim books and web sites and other sources, take notes (following the protocols of automatic note taking http://edshare.soton.ac.uk/17294/)

As your understanding deepens, use the findings from your investigations to help you effectively extend the superstructure and build an outline sketch of your report in the form of an extended abstract.

Guidance:

The extended abstract will devote about a half page to each of the four or five sections of the abstract. It will communicate the scope and scale of the problem you are considering. It will be supported by arguments and references (probably only a few per section), perhaps a diagram or two (which will of course make the contents longer - increasing relevant sections to about one page in length). You will conclude with some indication of the way in which your findings will be shaped.

The references will be cited in Harvard style and listed at the end of the abstract.

Possible Tools (extended abstract):

You may find the Manchester phrase bank http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/about-academic-phrasebank/ helpful in terms of putting your argument together.

Interdisciplinary writing

If you are working on an interdisciplinary project, you will probably find it very useful to use diagrams to explain Interdisciplinarity and common ground (Repko, 2007).

References:

Repko, A.F., 2007. Integrating Interdisciplinarity: How the Theories of Common Ground and Cognitive Interdisciplinarity Are Informing the Debate on Interdisciplinary Integration. Issues in Integrative studies, 25, pp.1–31.