

Chairs of Urban Water Management

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Guide to Report Writing

Basic principles

- A report must be logically set up and should also be clearly understandable for other experts (completeness).
- A short report is always preferable to a longer one (given the same amount of content).
- Before writing the thesis, define the main objectives and ensure that the complete report addresses these objectives.
- Allocate twice as much time for writing the report as initially anticipated.

Form

- Select a font size between 11-12 points.
- Use justified text with hyphenation to display continuous text.
- The first time you use an abbreviation in the text, present both the spelled-out version and the short form in parentheses after it. After you define an abbreviation, use only the abbreviation.
- Use a consistent tense within a chapter.

Style

- Use clear and precise language. Avoid complicated sentences.
- Avoid filler words (especially, also, furthermore ...) and exaggerations (very, extremely, ...).
- Replace empty phrases (an expert in the area of water protection, due to the fact that, ...) with simple words (an expert in water protection, because, ...).
- Avoid nominalizations: Write «She was not authorized to distinguish A from B» instead of «She had no authorization to make a distinction between A and B».
- Do not form comparatives/superlatives of absolute adjectives (optimal, unique, ...).
- Use the en dash (–) instead of the hyphen (-) to represent a span or range of numbers. There should be no space between the en dash and the adjacent material: 2–7 mm, 1965–1970.
- The following applies when using units:
 - There is a non-breaking space between the numerical value and the unit symbol.
 - The multiplication between two units is indicated through a space. And division is represented by a negative power.
 - A unit is modified by attaching descriptive information to it without space.
 - Examples: 3 %, 12 m³ s⁻¹, 2.67 gN gCOD⁻¹.
 - The *LaTeX* package *siunitx* allows easy handling of units according to the above specifications.

Literature

- *Mendeley* (for *Word* and *LaTeX*) or similar programs allow a simplified management and citation of literature. See Moodle course on reference management and plagiarism: <https://moodle-app2.let.ethz.ch/course/view.php?id=19843>
- Each journal and book publisher has their own citation styles. We recommend the guidelines developed by the *American Psychological Association* (APA).

Figures

- A descriptive caption clearly indicates what the figure or table illustrates without having to read the main body of the text. It is placed below the figure (and above the table).
- Use different line types (solid, dashed, or dotted) or marker symbols to keep the graphics grayprint-friendly.
- Create axes labels in a readable size that match the font of the main text, contain units, and no superfluous decimal places.
- Image format:
 - JPG: For photographs due to the smaller file size.
 - PNG: For schemes.
 - PDF: For schemes, if the editor preserves vector graphics (e. g. *LaTeX*).

Structure

Title page

- Content: Title, author, supervision, professor, institution, date.
- No page numbering.
- Include the full academic credentials. Example: Prof. Dr. Place Holder.

Declaration of originality

- <https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/main/education/rechtliches-abschluesse/leistungskontrollen/declaration-originality.pdf>.
- Embed directly after the title page (also in the digital version).

Abstract

- 300 words approximately, at most one A4 page.
- Concise and complete (contains research question, used methods, and most important results).
- Page numbering in small Roman numerals.
- No title numbering.

Table of contents

- A maximum of 3 subheading levels.
- Page numbering in small Roman numerals.

List of abbreviations

- Contains abbreviations and acronyms for subject-specific terms.
- Page numbering in small Roman numerals.
- In contrast, a list of tables and figures is not required for reports.

Introduction

- Provides scientific background.
- Defines research questions.
- Page numbering in Arabic numerals (from here on).
- Start of title numbering.

Material and methods

- Ensures reproducibility.

- States background material and assumptions made.
- References manufacturer and exact product name of equipment/chemicals/software.

Results

- The results are systematically presented and address the research questions.
- The figures and tables are relevant and comprehensible.

Discussion

- Results are discussed in a broader context and compared with literature.
- Only the results presented in the *Results* section are discussed; the *Appendix* must not be referenced.
- Hypotheses are identified as such and justified with data.
- Uncertainties are addressed.

Conclusions

- Answer the research questions.
- Include only points that are covered in the *Results* and *Discussion* sections.
- Conclude with a recommendation and/or a concise message.
- The conclusions can be presented together with the discussion (especially for shorter reports).

Bibliography

- Use consistent referencing in the text. Recommended: Name + year, e.g. [Smith 1999].
- The *original* source should be cited.

Appendix

- Allows in-depth study of the work.
- Contains long calculations, extensive illustrations, etc. An abridged version of these is included in the main report so that it remains understandable without studying the appendix.
- The report should refer to all sections, graphs and tables in the Appendix.
- Large files (e.g. models) are to be included as a digital appendix.

Resources on English Writing (ETH/UZH)

Self Study

Workbook: "Writing Scientific English" (UTB). <https://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/slz/infosys/?p=41975>. Book can be borrowed at the *Selbstlernzentrum* at ETH Hönggerberg.

Moodle: EAP/ESP online learning lab

Courses

Coaching: Three private lessons on Academic Writing at the *Sprachenzentrum* (total 495 CHF). <https://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/static/services/prod/frontend/fKursdetail.php?sprachid=sprache:englisch&targetgpId=zielgruppe:wissenschaftlichETHZ&lang=de&kursnr=76383337-d3ae-43ba-a049-471f07018196>.

Writing Center: Private consultation to discuss a text and receive suggestions for improvement. [https://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/de/Dienstleistungen/Writing-Center-\(English\).html](https://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/de/Dienstleistungen/Writing-Center-(English).html).

Schreibwerkstatt: You can work on your text and improve your writing expertise (vocabulary, orthography, grammar, text structure or fluidity) supported by tutors. <https://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/static/services/prod/frontend/fKursdetail.php?sprachid=sprache:uebergreifend&targetgpId=zielgruppe:wissenschaftlichETHZ&lang=de&kursnr=b993d814-edad-4c02-a4c0-203cabb60007>