

5 - MAKING A RESEARCH REPORT

In the Introduction, you were urged to use your printer - liberally. The computer is wonderful for retrieving information; but the computer screen is highly dysfunctional in terms of reading and understanding the information which you retrieved. A printed book is a much better display device.



DoctorInternet

It is easy to feel that once the data have been obtained that one has got the information; but that is just the beginning. To be information, the data must be organized, displayed, read and re-read, marked and annotated - in other words, the information must be worked in order for it to become understandable and useful. This applies equally for the patient/facilitator and to the medical professional. You can, of course, simply print out the search results in its raw format; and if that is all for which you have time, then it is adequate. However, the impact of information depends, in large measure, on the way it is displayed.

In this regard, it is recommended that you create a report template in your word processor, even if you are going to be the only one who reads it. Obviously, there is considerable variation in the format for such a report; but it will generally have the following components.

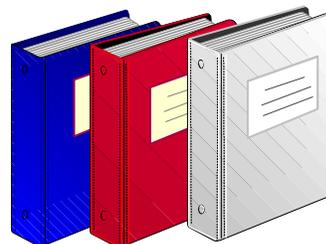
- **The Cover.** This should have a title for the subject of the report e.g., Research Report on (subject) and the date.
- **A Cover Letter.** If you are preparing the report for another, then on your letterhead, provide an over-view of your procedures including the databases used and other sources of information, and a synopsis of your findings.

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- **A Title Page.** This would reiterate the cover and include the name of the person who did the research and the name of the person for whom the report is intended.
- **A Table of Contents.** In the first column, cite the Database(s) or other sources used. In the second column, define the search commands which you employed for a particular retrieval, and in the third column note the page numbers of the section.
- **The Research Text.** At the beginning of each retrieval, record the search command so that one can assess the adequacy of the search and not redo work if subsequent retrievals are done. Then import the text of the retrievals into your template, and format it as desired. If appropriate, edit the citations and material, selecting for those which are most relevant. However, usually, it is best to include all of the information because that which, at first, may seem extraneous might, eventually, stimulate a line of inquiry or serendipitously prove to be useful.

Print the report on one side of the paper so that the opposing blank sheet can be used for notations. Incorporate the report into a three ring binder or take it to a local copy service and have them spiral bind it.

Once the research material is in a report format, if you are the person using the information, sit down in a quiet place and in an orderly manner, systematically go through the report, page by page, using a yellow marker, pen, or pencil to mark sections which have some interest. Make notes in the margins and adjacent blank page. This may seem a little naive to remind one how to read, but many people seem to have forgotten how to read intelligently - reading is a skill which must be practiced and developed. Proper reading, particularly of technical information, is a slower and more deliberate process, requiring reflection, and a lot is lost in thinking that one can flip through a document while watching television or in a distracting environment and still understand the information.



For an example of the construction of a formal medical research report, download and review one of the cancer reports at [<http://www.fis.org>].