

Guidance on Consultancy Report Contents

Introduction and Terms of Reference

This chapter should set the scene, give the reader a good picture of what the Consultancy is about, and why it's important.

The introduction tends to include these elements:

- An opening evaluation which explains the key issue and overall aim of the project. This should be supported with reference to appropriate data and evidence.
- The background context for the research. To write this, put yourself in the position of your client: what do they need to know to understand the background for this research?
- Make sure that the **rationale** for the investigation is clearly outlined and backed up by supporting secondary data
- The aim and objectives of the consultancy needs to be clearly outlined
- Terms of Reference. What are the proposed outcomes? What will the project deliver for your client? What is in scope/out of scope?
- A clear introduction to the problem that has been investigated
- A short paragraph explaining the structure of the Consultancy Report

Research Approach

This chapter **explains and justifies your decisions about the research approach** (*what you planned to do, and why*), as well as **describing the important procedures** (*i.e. what actually happened, such as how many focus group you organised, who was involved, how you analysed your data, etc*). You should demonstrate how your chosen research approach will address the aims and objectives of the consultancy.

The structure is similar to that used in a research proposal, but is more comprehensive. Your explanations should briefly acknowledge the advantages and limitations of your chosen approach.

It is in this section that you should present any theories, models and frameworks that will inform and assist in structuring the analysis of findings. This not a traditional literature review, it should highlight the conceptual tools that underpin the consultancy project. The evaluation and application of these conceptual tools will be the focus of the 'Academic Critique'.

It's useful to begin this chapter by discussing the nature of your 'phenomenon-of-interest', because that forms the foundation for the subsequent justification of your selected research approach. For example, are you interested in people's lived experiences? Or the nature of successful policy interventions? Or the details and complexities of a known case study, etc?

Your discussion should briefly acknowledge the [de]limitations of your chosen approach. You should acknowledge how your chosen research approach affects the kinds of **knowledge claims** you'll be able to make from your research. Linked to this, the chapter should discuss

'quality' considerations. In positivist research such as cross-sectional survey studies, this involves a discussion of validity, reliability and generalisability. If your research is more interpretive and qualitative, other quality considerations apply and your chapter should demonstrate your understanding of this point.

Ethical considerations are included in this chapter.

Please consult this advice if you have queries about ethical considerations, and involve your supervisor.

You may want to revisit some of the CAB materials. Additionally, some useful websites on research methods are:

[National Centre for Research Methods](#)

[Qualitative data analysis, at the University of Hull](#)

[Template analysis](#) (a form of thematic analysis), by Nigel King. An [article explaining its use is here](#).

A good article on [thematic analysis](#) is by Braun and Clarke, and is [here](#) .

Problem Definition (if applicable)

A more detailed discussion of the problem/s facing the consultancy client. This would be a more detailed elaboration of the Rationale for the investigation. This will be a critical evaluation of the current situation and will need to be supported with reference to relevant data.

Evaluation and Analysis of Findings

In this chapter, you should present your findings in a way which allows the reader to get a sense of 'what the data says' (from interviewees, questionnaires, secondary data documents etc.).

Your choice of structure will depend on many things such as your consultancy problem, your client requirements, research approach, and methods of analysis.

Whatever your structure, think about giving your reader the 'bigger picture' as well as the richer detail. For example, in quantitative research, don't ignore outliers as these might lead to interesting insights. In qualitative research, don't just tell your reader what 'most' people said if there are important minority opinions too.

Think carefully about how you will present and display your data.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this chapter, you need to link back to the beginning and re-visit your Consultancy aims and objectives, showing how you've addressed them all. Clarify the key conclusions that you are making from your research. Identify alternatives if relevant.

You should summarise the outcomes of the investigation and present your recommendations to your client in the report

Discuss any 'limitations' of the research and explain how these have helped you decide what you can (and cannot) claim from your research. You may also want to identify areas that are 'out of scope' that would benefit from further research.