

Authors' guide
for NCVER
research reports



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Please read this guide before starting your report.

Introduction

"Clarity of writing usually follows clarity of thought."

The Economist Style Guide <<http://www.economist.com/research/styleGuide/index.cfm?page=673899>>

This guide is for researchers preparing reports according to NCVER style, which aims to make them informative and readable for our target audiences—primarily policy-makers and practitioners in the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

Writing style

NCVER published reports should:

- ➔ be written in plain English for the educated layperson
- ➔ be simple, clear and concise
- ➔ contain a strong line of argument and tell a good story
- ➔ be based on evidence, not opinion
- ➔ use acronyms as sparingly as possible
- ➔ use minimal capitalisation.

Audience

NCVER promotes research reports to a wide audience, including policy-makers, education specialists, teachers and trainers, education and training providers and employers.

Reports need to be easily accessible to this range of readers. Where the subject matter is highly technical, it should be accompanied by a clear presentation and analysis of the research findings. Technical reports are produced as supporting documents (see 'Support documents' section).

Editing

It is a contractual requirement that external researchers follow good professional practice and submit reports to NCVER *after* they have been given a substantial edit according to NCVER style and using NCVER templates. Reports will then be subjected to NCVER's quality assurance procedures.

As part of the publication process, NCVER will give the final report a copy edit. Should a more substantial edit be required, NCVER will arrange this but at the researcher's expense. The report will also be proofread just prior to publishing. See below for definitions of different types of editing.

Substantial edit

As a guide, this includes:

- ➔ ensuring that the educated layperson can understand what is written
- ➔ ensuring the accuracy of what has been written and examining the text for any legal issues, where necessary
- ➔ restructuring the document to aid natural progression of the argument, if necessary
- ➔ making sure that the executive summary is a stand-alone document and can be easily understood
- ➔ applying NCVER's 'house style'.

Copy edit

As a guide, this involves:

- ➔ looking at sense and suggesting alternative wording for clarity of meaning, where necessary
- ➔ correcting grammar, spelling and checking cross references
- ➔ replacing unnecessary acronyms and ensuring that those used are explained in full
- ➔ checking for consistency throughout the document
- ➔ making sure tables and graphs are easily understood
- ➔ checking table and figure numbers run consecutively
- ➔ checking tables and graphs for headings and consistent presentation
- ➔ checking that the reference system has been used correctly and all details are included
- ➔ checking that NCVER's house style has been applied correctly
- ➔ checking that the contents page has the appropriate entries.

Write clearly and concisely, with a general audience in mind.

Keep your report acronym free and use minimal capitalisation.

Proofread

As a guide, this includes:

- correcting any typographical errors
- checking that placement of figures, diagrams, tables etc. are satisfactory
- checking that page lengths are suitable, and that formatting and the contents page are correct
- checking that the imprint page has the necessary details
- checking that page numbers and footers are correct.

Basic style guidelines

To help speed up the editing process, please follow these commonly missed style tips.

- NCVER promotes acronym-free reports. Where acronyms must be used, they should be spelt out in full the first time they are used.
- Use minimal capitalisation throughout.
- Don't add extra line space after each paragraph (the template will automatically generate a space).
- Don't use colour without consultation with your NCVER project officer.
- For more details about NCVER's writing 'house style', see the 'A to Z of NCVER's publications style guide' section.

Data checking

In addition to editing your report, you will need to check the accuracy of all data. This includes checking any data cited against the source (if it has been cited from elsewhere) and also checking that any data mentioned in the text match data reported in tables.

Your report will also undergo NCVER's own data checking procedures. It is our policy to check all NCVER data that are cited in a report. This involves checking the accuracy against the original data, whether it is cited from another NCVER report or gained through a data request. It also involves a check of all data references in the text against data reported in tables.

NCVER will not check data sourced from other places. This is solely the author's responsibility.

Templates

Reports must be submitted using NCVER's templates. These are available at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/information/templates.html>.

The NCVER template provides the essential house style elements for formatting your report in Word for Windows and for Macintosh. It includes pre-set type styles for:

- text (with automatic paragraph spacing)
- headings
- dot points
- tables
- quotes
- references.

If you are unsure of how to apply the style sheet, please contact our production help desk on (08) 8230 8417.

Blurbs

You will need to supply a blurb when submitting your final report, which is then displayed on the web with the report in NCVER's publications catalogue. Blurbs are important because they are usually the reader's first point of contact with a report and will help them to decide whether it is of interest to them.

Break the text into logical sections to give your report structure.

The blurb should be a maximum of 100 words and include:

- an introductory context sentence, where necessary—for example, a technical report discussing recognition of prior learning would need a sentence explaining what this term means
- the aim of the study
- one or two of the main findings.

It should be clear and jargon-free, for anyone to understand, and methodology should not be included.

Report structure

Title page

The title of your report should give the reader a clear idea about its contents. Keep it short and succinct (no more than 14 words including subtitle).

Ensure the authors are cited in order of their contribution to the report. Only include those who have made a significant contribution. List those whose contribution has been minor under the Acknowledgments section.

Arrange authors' names in alphabetical order if all contributed equally.

Imprint page

Also known as the reverse title, this is for printing and copyright details. NCVER will fill in the necessary information required here.

Discuss with the NCVER project officer when special copyright permission is required.

About the research

All NCVER publications carry an introduction from the Managing Director, which places the report in context and distils its key messages. This section is written by NCVER. Authors will see this page during the pre-production process.

Acknowledgments

Use acknowledgments sparingly. They should outline those who have given particular help with your report, not necessarily everyone involved in it.

Contents

Entries should be in sentence case—first word capitalised; the rest in lower case. A contents page is automatically generated in the template.

- Cite only first and second-level headings.
- List any tables and figures separately after the general contents.

Executive summary (for standard reports)

Most reports will include an executive summary of no more than three pages. This should stand alone as a synopsis of the research and its key findings.

Abstracts (for Monograph series reports)

Monograph series reports will include an abstract instead of an executive summary.

It is important to stress that monographs should be written with the same audiences in mind—policy-makers and practitioners, rather than academics.

Body of the report

The report should be approximately 10 000 to 15 000 words, or about 25 pages in length. It should be a concise analytical work, with a well-structured argument.

- Begin each chapter on a new page but don't add blank pages.
- Don't number the chapter headings.
- Use the footer style shown in the template, with even-numbered pages showing the publication title and odd-numbered pages showing NCVER.

Support documents should contain any extra non-essential information which enhances the credibility of your research.

- NCVER encourages the use of sub-headings to describe the content of sections succinctly.
- Summarise the main points of the chapter at the beginning rather than the end.
- By all means, summarise data in tables, graphs or charts, but don't restate everything contained and evident in them. Large amounts of data should be included in your support documents, together with detailed explanations.

References

NCVER referencing style is based on the Harvard, or author–date, style which cites references in text and lists them at the back of the report (see the 'Referencing' section for details).

- List only works cited in text in the references.
- Compile a bibliography (a further reading list) only if specially requested.
- It is worth noting that incomplete and inaccurate references are a major cause of the delays during the publishing process.

Footnotes

- Use footnotes sparingly for asides in text. Do not use endnotes.
- Do not confuse footnotes with references.

Appendices

Appendices are expected to contain critical information which explains concepts reported in the body of the report or detailed documentation of methodology.

- Begin each appendix on a new page, with its own title and identify A, B, C etc.
- Restart table numbering with each new appendix and label A1, A2... B1, B2... etc.
- Set out the title of each appendix on the main contents page.

Support documents

These are separate documents which contain background information such as:

- an extended literature review
- full case study reports
- a full description of the methodology, including a copy of survey questions
- a full description and analysis of the findings, including data tables or graphs
- highly detailed or technical information.

There is a separate template for support documents. NCVER does not do anything to support documents other than convert them to a pdf file. Please ensure they are formatted correctly, edited and proofread.

Referencing

Following the Harvard, or author–date, style, a list of references contains details of only the works cited in the text. This is provided at the end of the report or, with edited anthologies, at the end of each author's chapter.

If you use a referencing software tool such as 'EndNote' to construct your reference list, please make sure you copy this into the final Word version of your report.

If you have used the VOCEDplus database <<http://www.voced.edu.au>> for your research, a reference list can be automatically generated using the 'Get citation' tool in VOCEDplus.

NCVER uses minimal capitalisation, no full stops in initials, commas to separate all items and a full stop only at the end of the entry. References for general publications should include the following:

1. author's surname, initials (no full stops)
2. year of publication
3. title in italics or quotes if unpublished
4. series if applicable
5. volume no. if applicable
6. edition if applicable
7. editor/reviser/compiler/translator

NCVER uses the Harvard, or author-date, style of referencing.

8. publisher
9. place of publication
10. page no. if applicable
11. date viewed and <http://URL> if applicable

For more information, see the Australian Government's *Style manual: For authors, editors and printers* (2002, 6th edn).

In-text references

Standard entries (depending on sense):

... (Smith 1990, p.64)

Smith (1990) says ...

... (Smith et al. 1990)

Smith et al. (1990) said ...

Smith and Jones (1990) agreed that ...

(Smith, Jones & Brown 1990, pp.21–36)

... as described by Smith, Jones and Brown (1990, pp.21–36)

(Smith, Jones & Brown 1990; Smith 1991)

Use et al. only when there are four or more authors to list in text.

Books

Smith, B 1991, *The arts of education: a sociological study*, Bloggs & Co, London.

Jones, A 1991, 'Teaching and learning', in *The arts of education: a sociological study*, ed. B Smith, Bloggs & Co, London.

Unpublished material

Walters, B, 'What is the world coming to?', paper presented to the Predictions for the Future Conference, 20–22 May 2002, Sydney.

Jennings, D 1990, 'Whitewash and blackboards', unpublished MA thesis, Macquarie University, New South Wales.

Journals/newspapers

Dewhirst, C 1986, 'Hot air over the Himalayas', *World Geographic*, vol.1, no.4, pp.44–55.

Brandis, G 1987, 'The Liberals: just who is forgetting whom?', *Weekend Australian*, 24–25 January, p.19.

Government reports

Department of Employment and Industrial Relations 1994, *Annual Report 1993–94*, Australian Government Press Services, Canberra.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999, *The labour force, Australia*, cat.no.6203.0, ABS, Canberra.

Websites

Websites require the author's name, year, site created/updated, name and place of sponsor of the source, date viewed and <http://URL>.

NCVER, 2006, NCVER, Adelaide, viewed 28 September 2006, <http://www.ncver.edu.au>.

Graphics

If you are using graphics in your publication, please follow these guidelines provided to ensure they are of appropriate quality for publishing.

Tables and graphs

We have produced an authors' guide for graphs and tables, available at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/information/authorguides.html>. Please read this document before starting your report. It will give you information on types of graphs, fonts, colours etc. to ensure you meet NCVER's requirements.

As a rule, provide any graphics used in your report as separate files and do not embed them in the text.

Pictures

- Supply files of any photographs included in your report separately, including copyright information.
- If you wish to import drawings into your document as a picture, please supply original drawings to allow modifications if necessary.
- Supply all diagrams and samples of printed pages as separate hard copy images.
- Supply high quality images (min. 300 dpi) if you wish, but they must be separate graphic files in eps or tif format.
- Do not embed images in the text.

A to Z of NCVER's publications style guide

NCVER's style is based on the Australian Government's *Style manual: for authors, editors and printers* (2002, 6th edn). Please refer to this publication if you are unable to find clarification of a style here.

Please note: while some elements in this guide have equally correct alternatives, please use the preferences listed here to help us achieve consistency across our reports. NCVER uses the Macquarie Dictionary of Australian English, so please use this when clarifying spelling.

A

acknowledgment: not acknowledgement

acronym (or initialism): word formed by the initials of a proper name; no full stops.

acronym-free: NCVER prefers acronym-free reports. Where acronyms must be used, they should be spelt out in full the first time they are used.

age: always use 'year'

- males aged 14 years
- he is 14 years old

- the 14 to 19 years age group.

C

capitalisation: NCVER style is to use minimal capitalisation; i.e. only full proper names need initial capitalisation:

- the Box Hill Institute of TAFE
- the Box Hill institute
- the institute

Book titles are treated as sentences—initial capital and first word of any subtitle:

- *Teaching vocational mathematics*
- *Writing in plain English: a fanciful theory*

For serial titles, keep capitals throughout—except articles (a, the), prepositions (by, with, to) and conjunctions (but, so, and):

- the *International Journal of Training Research*

certificates: a certificate I, II, III or IV but the Certificate IV in Caravan Park Supervision

chair/chairperson: chair preferred

collections: capitalised when full name used:

- National Apprentice and Trainee Collection
- National VET Provider Collection
- National VET Financial Data Collection

cooperation: no hyphen

coordination: no hyphen

D

data: plural of datum, i.e. statistical data were collected

dates: present in ascending order: ddmmyyyy

- Friday, 31 December 1992
- 1 January 1993 (no comma)
- 1990s (no apostrophe)
- 1990–93 (closed en dash) for 1990 to 1993
- 1990/93 for 1990 or 1993
- 31 Dec 1992 – 1 Jan 1993 (spaced en dash)

director: a director; the director but the Managing Director of NCVER

dot points: for emphasis of lists of words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs. Always standardise the word order and grammar to make the comparisons clear and consistent (parallelism).

a) Full sentence/paragraph dot point

- Each point has an initial capital and a full stop at the end of each line.
- Each point can be more than one sentence.
- The list needs no lead-in phrase.

b) Incomplete sentence (words/phrases) dot points

In this case you should:

- lead in with a phrase ending in a colon
- omit punctuation at line ends until final line
- keep initial of the first word in lower case
- omit conjunctions ['and' or 'or'] between entries
- put a full stop at the end of the last dot point only.

E

ellipsis: three (not two nor four) dots to indicate missing words with space either side:

- National Centre ... Research Ltd

et al.: full stop after al.

F

focused/focusing: one 's'

footnotes: use sparingly, for supplementary text not references

full-time: always hyphenated

G

government(s): general use is not capitalised

- a government policy
- several state governments
- a federal government

Government: specific use is capitalised

- the Federal Government

I

Indigenous: always with capital 'I'

internet: not Internet

italics: sloping type based on calligraphy and manuscripts; use for:

- published titles
- emphasising words in text (don't use bold)
- unusual foreign words

J

judgment: not judgement

M

Minister: a/the minister; but the Minister for Education and Training

N

na [not applicable]: no full stop as this will affect decimal tabulation when used in tables

n.d. [no date] date available/undated

numbers: ten and under in text or any beginning a sentence are spelled out in full.

- Twenty-five students were from interstate, six from New Zealand and 12 from Asia.
- No commas between digit groups; use spaces when 10 000 and over.

Columns of figures in tables must be consistent; if there is one figure with a space for the comma, all figures must have the space, even if less than 10 000.

- No apostrophe in decades; e.g. 1990s

O

online: no hyphen

For consistency, please follow this guide, even though there may be more than one 'correct' way.

P

parenthesis: parenthetical remarks (i.e. asides in brackets)

- in round brackets (if author's comment)
- in square brackets [if editor's comment]

part-time: always hyphenated

people: not persons

per cent or percentage: % for tables and text except at the beginning of a sentence

program: preferred option unless it's part of an official name, e.g. Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme

quotations: verbatim quotes

- Fewer than three lines stay in text and are distinguished by single quote marks.
- Three or more lines of quotation are indented as a separate paragraph, with no quote marks

Q

qualifications: title case when full and proper name used:

- a graduate diploma but the Graduate Diploma of Education

quotation marks: single for most uses:

- quotations from text
- journal articles
- unpublished titles
- a new or unusual word in text (a 'neologism')

Double only for:

- direct speech
- quotes within quotes

R

references: at end of report in author–date system with:

- minimum capitalisation
- commas between items
- no full stops until end of entry

- italicised (not underlined) published titles
- see 'Referencing' section for more detail and examples

S

state(s)/territory(s): no capitalisation unless referring to the full and proper name of a state/territory body

surveys: capitalised when full name used:

- Student Outcomes Survey
- Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System
- Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth
- the youth survey

T

thousands

- 1 000–9999 = no space or comma
- 10 000 + = space, no comma

training packages: a training package, the General Construction Training Package

W

web: publications sourced from the internet need date viewed and http:// URL in <> parenthesis, i.e. viewed 15 July 2004, <http://www.ncveredu.au>

Z

z: always use 's' except in names; i.e. organisation not organization, but World Health Organization



**National Centre for Vocational
Education Research**

Level 11, 33 King William Street,
Adelaide SA 5000

PO Box 8288, Station Arcade,
Adelaide SA 5000, Australia

Phone: (08) 8230 8400

Fax: (08) 8212 3436

Web: <http://www.ncver.edu.au>

Email: ncver@ncver.edu.au

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