

executive summary : Executive summary style guide

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abstract : This document presents, *in executive summary format*, a style guide for authors preparing executive summaries for my classes at Western Michigan University.

keywords : executive, format, references, style, summary

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1. Purpose and spirit of an executive summary (considered in general)

summary A short document that presents the most important points associated with a subject

executive A manager or supervisor : the person for whom the report is written, someone who is very busy and will read your summary to get all the key points on the subject without having to glean through less important information which you have suppressed.

An executive summary is a

short report
often placed at the beginning of a full report
but which can be free-standing
that is as long as necessary but not any longer

which organizes and then presents in a very clear way
the most essential information about a particular subject.

The type of information presented depends on
the subject, and
the presumed familiarity of the executive with the subject.

A successful executive summary should leave the reader with confidence in understanding

the general nature of the subject
important points of controversy (if any)
decisions that need to be made (if any)
action alternatives with their cost/benefit quantified (if possible)
recommendations (if appropriate)
where to go for more information.

2. Format elements of the executive summary

a. Title page

- i. title
- ii. version
- iii. author(s)
- iv. abstract (very brief)

b. Body

- i. Every page has a footer with
 - (1) subject
 - (2) version
 - (3) author(s)
 - (4) running page number *and* total number of pages

The title page is page 0 (or more properly, page i).

- ii. The content and organization of the body of the summary is subject dependent.

c. References

Use the citation guidelines presented in:

Citation and acknowledgment guide [P]

3. Stylistic pointers
 - a. Be concise and clear (this is often **very** difficult).
 - b. Use a highly structured page layout when suitable.
 - c. Treat your summary as a set of overhead slides, thus making your summary immediately suitable for presentation.
 - d. Follow as closely as possible the layout formats and header styles presented in this executive summary
 - title page
 - footers
 - etc...
 - e. Always begin the **References** with a new page.

References

- [SW] W. Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 3e, Macmillian Publishing Co., New York, 1979.

This is a timeless classic on English composition that might be helpful ... here is the citation for the copy I own it is only 85 pages long.

- [P] T.F. Piatkowski, *Citation and acknowledgment guide*, Western Michigan University, July 24, 2000, contained in:
<http://www.cs.wmich.edu/~piat/professions.html>
(visited Aug. 29, 2000).<label> <citation>