

Reports and essays – so what’s the difference?

Both essays and reports need:

- A formal style of writing
- Careful proof-reading and neat presentation
- Introduction, body and conclusion
- Analytical thinking
- Care to ensure that you respond to all parts of the topic.

But there are some important differences between the two.

A Report	An essay
Presents information	Presents an argument *
Is meant to be scanned quickly by the reader	Is meant to be read carefully
Uses numbered headings and sub-headings	Rarely uses sub headings
May not need references and a reference list	Always needs references and a reference list
Uses short concise paragraphs and dot points	Links ideas together in paragraphs and does not use dot point lists
Uses graphics where possible (tables, graphs, diagrams)	Rarely uses graphics
May need a summary (sometimes called an abstract)	Only needs a summary if it is very long or your teacher asks for one
May be followed by recommendations and/or appendices	Seldom has recommendations or appendices

* An essay is your answer to a question. Sometimes you have to rewrite the topic in question(s) form before you start.