



Writing an Executive Summary

Writing an executive summary can be a daunting task, whether it's for a report, in response to a request for proposal or for developing a new business unit. Here are a few things to keep in mind the next time you sit down to write an executive summary.

- An executive summary gives a quick preview of the report or proposal. Don't go into too much detail or you'll lose your reader. Instead, include your main recommendation and the basic reasoning behind your decision. Detailed numbers aren't necessary, but meaningful statistics that support your recommendation can be helpful.
- Write your summary after you've written the main report or proposal. This will allow you to easily pull out the recommendation and supporting points contained within your report. Look through your report for headings and transitional words such as therefore, finally, however.
- Remember that the executive summary may be read by high level decision makers who aren't familiar with more technical terms. Be sure to include key words, but avoid using jargon or acronyms that are hard to decipher.
- When writing your executive summary, list the main points in the order they are in the report. This will keep everything in a logical sequence as you write and as your audience reads the executive summary. Readers looking for more detail on a particular statement or supporting data will have an easier time finding it if you keep things in order.
- Don't let the executive summary get too long. In general, a report or proposal of three or four pages probably doesn't need a summary. Typically an executive summary is about 10-15% of the length of the full document.

- Remember that an executive summary should be easy to read. Before you send it out, have a colleague or associate unfamiliar with the report read the summary to make sure it is easy to follow and understand.
- Finally, don't forget to use spell check and proofread your summary.

If you're looking for help designing your next training session or writing a proposal and executive summary for an educational program give me a call. I can help with both the planning and implementation of all types of training programs.

Karen DeYoung is principal of DeYoung Consulting Services, which provides quality learning experiences for individuals and groups. We develop training materials and activities that advance individual, team, and organizational learning. Our work is done with integrity, reliability, and accountability.

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