UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN DENMARK

Report Writing

Guidance for writing project reports in the P-, M- and GMM-engineering programmes

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Foreword

This folder is written for the students of Production Technic, Manufacturing and Management Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Global Management and Manufacturing at the Faculty of Engineering in SDU. The purpose of the folder is to help the students with structure, formalities and general knowledge of writing reports.

From experience structure and formalities take up a lot of time during the first couple of projects, but when the students master these, they stay useful through the entire education. When the structure and the formalities are clearly defined, the supervisor and the students can use the supervision to focus on the academic content of the projects instead.

The folder provides guidance for structure and formalities for the project reports, but does not contain academic content. This means that the main content of the report will not be discussed, since this folder can be used independently of content and subject. The academic content is defined each semester by the semester supervisors. The supervisor may also, especially on the first semesters, choose to leave out parts of the report.

The inspiration during the creation of this folder has primarily been taken from the following literature: Dahl, Dich, m.fl. (2010), Rienicker & Jørgensen (2010), Longhi (2009), Harboe (2006) og Cottrell (2008).

Enjoy working with your project reports!

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1. Report Structure

This chapter explains how a project report is built up and the content of the opening and ending chapters. There are several schools of report structures, which often are depending on the academic area that the report covers but also which type of project the report deals with.

A project report contains the following:

- Front-page
- Title Sheet in the Report
- Table of Content
- Foreword
- Abstract
- Intro and Problem Statement
- Method and Project Delimitations
- Main Chapter of the Report containing academic Content
- Discussion of Methods and Results
- Conclusion
- Perspective
- Appendix
- Management Report
- Process Report
- References
- List of References

In the following the content of each of the above will be explained with the exception of references, which will be explained in chapter 2 “Formalities of report writing”

1.1 Front-page

The front-page has significance in relation to the readers first impression of the report. Many want to put a personal touch on the front-page using a picture, op. cit. or similar, which is fine. However it is important that the following information is shown on the front-page: Title – and possible sub-titles, author name(s), date of hand-in, institution, report type, course, semester and supervisor(s)

1.2 ”Form for Project Title/Receipt”

In most cases the student have make their own project title, which matches the content of the project. It is important that the title is as clear and precise as possible. The project title, which is put on the students’ diploma, must be in English. In reports written in Danish the title must be shown in both Danish and English.

The purpose of showing the project title on the diploma is to help future employers create an overview of which types of projects the student has made. For this reason, students should be very careful formulating a great project title.

Long titles may cause confusion and in order to avoid this, it is in some cases possible to formulate a main title and a sub title. Basically the following counts for creation of titles:

”Words that do not add value, takes value away”

Along with the project the ”Form for project title/receipt” is handed-in either to the study secretary, semester coordinator or project Supervisor. The study secretary forwards the form to the exam office. If a receipt of hand-in is wanted, the student(s) has to bring two copies of the form and one of these are signed and returned to the student. The form is filled out electronically (except signature) and can be found on SDU’s homepage.

1.3 Title Sheet in the Report

In the report itself, there must be a so-called title sheet, which is to be placed right after the front-page.

The title sheet must contain the following information:

University, faculty, education, project description (f. inst. M/P-PTE1 – Product Development), project title (in English and possibly Danish), project Authors (name + signature), project supervisors, page number, number of appendixes and project period.

1.4 Table of Content

A table of content shows on which pages the individual chapter's start. Front-page, title sheet and the table of content themselves are not contained in the table of content. Appendixes are numbered independently and are shown in the last part of the table of content. Appendixes are not part of the main report but are attached to the report. If the project contains tables and figures these must also be numbered independently.

The management report and the process report are placed in the front and in the end of the report respectively, and are not mentioned in the table of content.

1.5 Foreword

In some reports the author may wish the make a foreword. This might be thanks to the collaborators, a dedication of the project to a certain person, or because they want to explain changes in the premises of the report.

A foreword is not a mandatory part of a project. It is as the name implies "before the word", which means before the report itself and can be left out for the most part.

1.6 Abstract

An abstract is not a conclusion, but some kind of a CV of the project. The abstract must therefore be readable independently of the report, which means that the abstract must as a whole on its own. An abstract must be short (normally 10-15 lines) and should summarize the content of the report. It must therefore contain a description of the problem, the method, the results, and the conclusions made based upon the project. An abstract should be readable by academic peers who are not experts on the area and should create the basis for a decision on whether to read or not to read the entire report. Therefore the abstract is placed in the front of the report even though it is written as some of the last part of the work. The abstract is written in English (also when the report is written in Danish)

1.7 Intro and Problem Statement

The first part of the report itself is the intro and the problem statement. All reports should be understandable by reading the problem statement and thereafter the conclusion. The intro and the problem statement is where the students define what the project concerns, and which questions (problems) the students want to answer in the report.

There are several types of projects. This folder differentiates between two:

- Bound tasks
- Independent tasks

The bound tasks are tasks that are designed for a specific purpose f. inst. a 2. semester project. The purpose of such a task is to establish a framework within which the students can practise academic knowledge and skills. These tasks are designed to give the students the opportunity to use theoretical knowledge in a fictitious/copied situation. This type of tasks only serves for educational purposes and will most often be seen in the first semesters of the education.

The independent tasks demands, as the name implies, a high degree of independency from the students. In these tasks the students often choose the subject, make the problem statement, seek/choose literature (theory), choose method, make analysis, setup alternative solutions and conclude. The independency might be restricted and the supervisors might already have made some choices.

In some scenarios students might be required to make problem statements in bound tasks, but then it is typically for educational purposes. A fourth semester project and a final project are independent projects.

Common for both types of projects are that they investigate a relevant problem in a relevant academic context in a scientific way. This means that the students work investigative and problem oriented.

The purpose of the intro and problem statement is to “set the scene” for the project, in other words, to introduce the project by describing the background and why the problem is relevant.

The intro and the problem statement is often built in 3 elements;

i. A general description of the problem
ii. A specific description of the problem
iii. A specific description of the exact problem formulated as a question or a hypothesis and supplemented by one or more sub-questions/-hypothesis, which the students want to answer through the project.

As an example an intro and a problem statement for this folder could be;

i. Students often have difficulties formulating problem statements that make them follow a logic and consequent method. How reports should be structured and which formalities to use, is therefore difficult for many students at SDU *(General Description of the Problem).*
ii. Especially students on P-, M- and GMM-educations have in later years had difficulties structuring their reports appropriately, since the work concerns different types of reports, and since the students to a higher degree are required to use science theoretical elements in the projects. Discussions regarding whether theory and methods should be part of the reports, have contributed to uncertainty regarding the wanted structure *(Specific Description of the Problem).*
iii. This folder will help clarify the formal demands for structure and formalities on the P-, M- and GMM-educations.

What are the formal demands regarding structure and formalities when writing project reports on the P-, M- and GMM-Educations?

1. ***How should a front-page look?***
2. ***How does one make references?***
3. ***Which chapters should be contained in a report?***

(Specific description of the problem formulated as a question with 3 Sub-questions that require and Answer).

Fig 1. Example of a Problem Statement formulated as Questions. Own Making

Problem statements can in some cases also be formulated as hypothesis, which are either rejected or accepted (because they can't be rejected) in the conclusion.

An intro leads to the problem statement. It starts with general considerations / questions and finally ends up in the specific problem statement.

An example of a problem statement (without intro) formulated as a hypothesis might look likes this (see fig. 2):

> ***It is possible to create cost reductions in company A's production.***
>
> 1. ***The throughput time can be reduced by 30%.***
> 2. ***The stock value can be halved.***
>
> *(Specific description of a problem statement as a hypothesis with 2 supplementary hypothesis that should either be accepted or rejected).*

Fig 2. Example of a problem statement formulated as a Hypothesis. Own Making

This example is specific and quantifiable. The goal and sub-goals should as far as possible be included in the problem statements sub-points, as shown in the examples above. If this is not the case, the project goal should be formulated subsequently.

In some projects it will be impossible to make a specific problem statement without having made the pre-analysis also called the problem analysis. If a problem is too big, unclear or there are doubts to it's existence, the problem analysis is conducted with the purpose of increasing the understanding of the problem and maybe clarifying deeper causes of the problem. Here the occurrence of the problem is investigated, how it is expressed, who the stakeholders are and finally the context of the problem. In these cases the problem analysis leads to the problem statement. The problem analysis is placed between the intro and the problem statement.

1.8 Method and Project Delimitation

After the motivation and the description of the problem(s), comes a description of the method and delimitation of the project along with eventually definitions. This can either be a part of the intro and problem statement or be in its own chapter. Often this depends on the size of the task at hand, but it is always a good idea to talk to your supervisor about the layout of the intro, problem statement, delimitation, method and any definitions

It is important that there is consistency between the problems of the project and the methods that are going to be used in order to investigate the problem. Many students have difficulties relating to the method, and it is important to get thoroughly into the problem and maybe ask ones supervisor regarding the choice of method.

Here we will describe the method generally. The words “investigative” and “problem oriented” are as previously mentioned keywords in projects on P-, M- and GMM. Therefore the decision is made based on the problem statement, on how the subject should be investigated or in other words, which investigatory methods to use in order to get from problem statement to conclusion. This means which methods/theories/models from the academic toolbox will be used and why these. How are they going to be used, and how does different methods relate to each other? Which methods are used in order to collect data/information, and which methods are used to analyse the gathered data and why.

When the methods that are going to be used have been described, it is often natural to involve a chapter that sketches the choices that have been made. It is also natural to write delimitation in which one specifies what one wants to investigate, and just as important where the delimitation of the project should be. When describing delimitation one makes choices for the area of the project, which will naturally lead to areas that will not be investigated. The delimitation is therefore necessary since it describes the “Red Line” of the project, and in some cases an overview-figure that sketches the progression of the report. This is especially the case in big projects and reports, which don’t follow the normal structure for that sort of projects. An overview-figure will not only create a clear “Red Line” for the reader, it will also function as a script for the authors of the project.

Method and delimitation has 2 Purposes:

- To visualize and argue for the meaning of the choice of method and delimitations of the Project.
- To help the reader and writers finding the “Red Line” of the project.

1.9 Main Chapter of the Report containing academic Content.

Now the problem, the method, the delimitation have been described and now comes miscellaneous chapters regarding the academic content of the report. This is typically descriptions, analysis, alternative solutions, financial considerations, implementation plan and so forth. All chapters must start with an intro (which justifies the relevance of the chapter) and end with a subset.

1.10 Discussion of Methods and Results

An especially important chapter is the discussion of the method and the found results. In this chapter students try to relate to the choices made throughout the report and hereby the academic and scientific importance regarding the way the investigation has been conducted. Students have to value and criticize the used methods and discuss the consequences the choice of method has had on the results. Students show that they are capable of valuing the quality of their own work, like valuing the quality of others work. If the suitability of a method can be questioned in relation to the specific problem, it is important to not only criticize the method but also argue why it could be used. This is also called method argumentation.

In this chapter the validity and reliability of the report is also discussed. This is called content argumentation. All chapters of the project must be relevant in accordance to the problem statement. Also there must be coherence between the problem statement, the gathered data and the conclusion. Furthermore it must be argued that the data, which the project is based on, is reliable. Answering the following questions for each set of data does this. 1) Are the gathered data reliable? 2) How is the measurements conducted? 3) Are the measurements precise? 4) Is the analysis/interpretation of the gathered data justified?

The discussion chapter should serve as the basis for the conclusion. Without the discussion it will be difficult to make a durable and credible conclusion.

1.11 Conclusion

A conclusion is a summary of the results the students have found during the creation of the report. This should however not be understood as a resume of what has been written but as an answer to the questions made in the problem statement. It is very important that these questions are answered but the conclusion should only contain the most important points and claims. There may not be any new material in a conclusion.

1.12 Perspective

If the students want to involve other perspectives a chapter called “Perspective” can be created after the conclusion. This chapter is not mandatory but can be used to describe which further investigation the report creates basis for, which other aspects could be relevant to take in, which parallels can be drawn to other areas and so on. The perspective is a discussion of the consequences of the conclusion in a broad perspective.

1.13 Appendix

An appendix might be a document, picture, drawing, internet print, brochure, calculations or similar, which are attached to the report. It is in other words a supplementary documentation or explanation for some text, calculations, drawings or similar in the report. The report must be readable independently of appendixes and therefore necessary information must be within the main report.

Appendixes are to be numbered independently, sequentially and must be equipped with a title and possibly explanatory text. Each appendix has its own page number, which is written “page number of total pages”

Typically appendixes are either indicated with capital letters (Appendix A, Appendix B…) or in roman numbers (Appendix I, Appendix II…). An appendix is only relevant if it is referred to within the report. However if this is not the case the appendix should not be included but should instead be referred to as a source. The appendix chapter must be easily manoeuvrable (f. inst. by use of dividers in between the appendixes) and an appendix overview should be inserted before the appendixes.

1.14 Management Report

A management report is an independent report. It must be readable independently of the report and serves the purpose of being a short basis for a decision made by the company/institute management. In practise the management will typically not have time to read the full report and therefore the management report is an important document. The management report contains a short summary of the problem, the method, the results and most importantly a recommendation for the management based on the knowledge achieved through the project. For this reason the financial considerations must always be part of the management report to supplements the recommendation to the management.

1.15 Process Report

The process report is an independent report typically because it is not handed-in to the company in those cases where the project is conducted for a company. In this report the learning process is described as well as the group's reflections on the process. It could for instance be a description and reflection of the time management of the project, the internal and external cooperation of the group, project management, work dispersion of the project and more. The process report intermediates the experiences and reflection on problem oriented project work. Through this the group is made aware of the project process and report writing process, which they may carry on to their next project.

2. Formalities of the Project Report

It is important that the projects that are part of the study live up to certain standards of formalities. In the worst case a op. cit. without reference can lead to a disciplinary case for examination cheating. Are the formalities not consistent or if the project does not follow the required formalities, it can be very confusing to the reader. Also it is part of the education that the student learns to make and document bigger projects.

2.1 Font size, Font and Line Spacing

The following is to be used:

Font size 12
Line spacing 1,5

Even though MS Word today has Font size 11 as standard, this is not the formality used by SDU. You could go into MS Word and define a new standard, which you can use when writing projects at SDU. The official font is “Times New Roman” and it is recommended to use this font. It is important that you don’t use a font that deviates too much from the standard. This is firstly because it might cause conversion issues when sending the documents electronically and secondly because *Some Fonts* can be difficult to read.

2.2 Margins

Margins are as a minimum 2,5 cm on all edges of the document and more in the “binding side”, if the report is to be put in a folder or similar. It is the responsibility of the students that the examiner and censor are able to read the content.

2.3 Pagination and Page Numbers.

Pagination starts when the report starts, which in most cases will be after the table of content. Each page of the report should be fully used. Deviations from that are between two main chapters. A main chapter, f. inst. a conclusion, always starts on a new page.

Some projects have a guiding number of required pages. This number counts for the report itself, meaning after the table of contents through to the perspective. Front page, table of content, management report, literature, references and process report and appendixes does not count towards the page number.

Number of pages includes figures and tables in the main report. Page number is therefore not given as an amount of strokes but only as number of pages in the report. Therefore it is important that the student(s) uses the entire page and sticks to the formalities regarding font type, margins and font size. Page number is placed most optimally (in regards to reading) in the bottom right corner or in the middle if both sides of the paper is used.

2.4 Figures and Tables.

As described in the previous, figures and tables count towards the number of pages. However this must not lead to students refraining from using figures and tables, since they often help create a good overview, and since it will require more space to describe the table or figure instead. Figures and tables should therefore be used to elaborate and create overview in connection with the chapter they are in. All figures and tables must be numbered accordingly – either throughout the entirety of the report or in each chapter. Furthermore title, source and eventual annotation should be shown. A figure- and table overview must be created in connection with the table of content. Table 1 is an example of how a table should be involved;

	Week Number								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Demand	10	10	10	10	15	15	15	20	20
Available	20	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MPS	0	0	10	10	15	15	15	20	20
On hand	30								

Table 1 – Example of how a –Table or figure should be involved. (title) Source: xxx

Though it is very important in connection with involvement of tables and figures that they can't stand alone, but should be commented and that the important points are part of the text. Therefore it is not permitted to insert tables and figures that the text does not refer to.

2.5 Formulas

There are a few rules when formulas are used in a report that should be observed. Before the formula is written there must be an introductive text to the formula. Afterwards the formula is written like this here (Christensen, Both & Sørensen (1994)):

$$s = \tfrac{1}{2}a_0t^2 + v_0t + s_0 \qquad (1)$$

Where s is the distance [m], a_0 are the beginning acceleration [m/s^2], t is time [s], v_0 is beginning speed [m/s] and s_0 is beginning position [m].

After the formula all variables must be described unless done earlier in the report. It is a good idea to add the unit of the variable in squared parenthesis, but can in some cases be left out.

When a new variable is defined a simple name should be chosen f. inst. *a* for acceleration. If there are more acceleration an index is addeda_0, a_1, a_2. This is a simpler then long name as f. inst. acc_1 or a_{init}. It is recommended to use the same format for variable names throughout the report. In the descriptive text it is a good idea to change font type for variable names so that it is clear that they are names.

Equations are indicated with a reference number shown in parenthesis, so one might refer to a position f. inst. (1).

2.6 References

It generally counts that the reader must always be able to value the credibility of the problem solving process. Precise references are very important because they provide the reader the opportunity to seek more information in the referenced material. Minutes from references, "borrowed" or less edited figures and tables and similar should therefore be clearly marked with reference. This is very important to avoid being suspected for cheating.

The American system (Harvard) must be used. This means that references must be part of the text and not as footnotes.

Examples:

> After Scheins (1994) conception it is so….
>
> Several Authors have developed models, which can be used here (fx Jensen, 1983; Olson & Møller, 1982; Reynolds, 1976).

Generally it can be said that the references must be made specifically, if elements from a specific page are being used. If material from an entire book is used, a general reference is enough, but if it is f. inst. a quote from a specific page a specific reference is a good idea. If the reference covers

multiple pages it should be shown like this:

> Longhi (2009, pp. 6-7) describes, what a front page must contain.

If the written language is English one writes p. (single page) and pp. (several pages).

Quotes can be used to a limited extend and must be stated as quotes and precise page number must be added.

Example:

> ”Contracts are used primarily when their usefulness is perceived to be greater than their cost” (Roxenhall & Ghauri, 2004, p. 261).

If Sources from the internet is used they must be shown as follows: http://www.boersen.dk (2011)

Finally it should be clear from the reference if the findings of others are used f. inst. from interviews, direct coping or minutes in unedited format. These should be accompanied by a reference, and might lead to rejection of the project if they are not. A rejection of a project counts as a used attempt towards an exam.

2.7 List of References

The last page of the report should contain all references used in the text. Several references to the same authors are distinguished through release date. References should not be sorted in types (Books, Articles etc.) but be listed in alphabetical order from the author’s first last name.

It must be possible for the reader to see which references have direct influence on the content of the report. It is therefore only the references that a used directly in the report that are to be listen in the reference list. This means that the reference list should not be divided into primary and secondary references – all quoted references in the project must be shown in the list of references. References may only be listed if used in the report.

Used books are shown as follows:

Meyers, Fred E. & Stewart, James R. (2002). *Motion and Time Study for Lean Manufacturing.* Prentice Hall.

Articles as follows:

Wensley, Robin (1981). Strategic marketing: Betas, boxes, or basics. *Journal of Marketing*, 45(3), p. 173-182.

Personal Interviews as follows:

Interview with Hans Hansen, Hansen & Søn, Hansinegade 22, 5000 Odense, Tuesday, April 12th 2011.

Internet sources as follows:

Steel types and Steel qualities: http://www.fagteori.dk/materialelaere/staaltyper-og-staalkvaliteter.aspx, visited April 12th 2011.

It is a good idea to print and save internet sources as documentation. Many homepages get updated regularly, meaning that a referred document might be removed, moved or updated. The supervisors or censor can require a copy of the document.

E-mails are not included in the reference list. The E-mail itself might be referenced in the report (E. Robbins, personal communication, January 4, 2011), and E-mails can be added as an appendix.

3. General Knowledge regarding the Project Process and Report Writing.

Beyond report structure and formalities some questions often occur regarding the project process and the report writing. Some of these questions are answered below.

3.1 Who are you writing to?

When writing a report, one should generally write to one own level. This means that a student on 1st Semester should write a report that is readable by another 1st semester student. When writing a bachelor project one should write to student at bachelor level. This especially counts in the usage of academic language in the reports. If terms that the readers are not expected to know are mentioned, the term should be explained, and exemplified. It is crucial that one does not write "up or down" in ones report, f. inst. it is not appropriate to write in an academic language to a blue color worker or opposite.

3.2 Examination Cheating.

On a University it is assumed that the report handed-in is an expression of an independent piece of work from one or several student. This means that one may not:

- Coping others reports or pieces of others reports.
- Copy entireties or pieces of other sources
- Used quotes without the use of quotation marks and reference.

This also means that students must refer to their references. If the references are not made in the report or quotes are not marked correctly, it might be considered examination cheating. Examination cheating is punishable and in severe cases might be reason for students getting expelled from the University. On the homepage the university have listed some specific principles for quotes in academic projects.

Teachers and censors read many projects, articles and book. It is therefore generally very easy to spot coping or quotes that are not marked correctly. Either it will be obvious that the language changes character or the reunion joy of reading a well known quote will quickly make the teacher view the report more critically. Therefore refrain from cheating – it is stupid and might cost you dearly! Furthermore the program safe assignment is used in certain semesters/projects. The program compares a given report with previously written reports at SDU and texts online. It is your responsibility to make sure that you reach the academic standard, and that references are marked as correctly as precisely as possible.

3.4 Argumentation

Missing or weak argumentation is often a pitfall during the making of reports. When arguing, it is important to state the strongest argument first and thereafter the weaker ones. Therefore it is important to prioritise ones arguments based on strength. Furthermore it is important to reproduce the references correctly and mark them as correctly as possible. An argument falls to the ground if the reference is wrongly marked.

3.5 Supervision

The role of the supervisor is to guide the students through the project phases. The supervisor should advise, discuss and ask questions. Successful supervision is often a question of levelling the anticipations of the students and the supervisor. Therefore it is a good idea to agree upon the boundaries of the supervision in the start of the project period. These boundaries can be an agreement on how to prepare for supervision, who requests the supervision, the form of the supervision and so on. The students can also express their level of ambition for the project since this also helps level the expectations. The supervisor will always want the student to perform to their best. Therefore it is a good idea to use the supervisor as much as possible.

Follow points describe the role of the supervisor:

- A supervisor is a sparring partner/coach
- A supervisor is not a project manager
- A supervisor is not a proof-reader
- A supervisor reads (judges) not a project before it has been handed-in
- Make your own choices; this is not a task for the supervisor.

On the first semesters the supervision will typically be on the initiative on the supervisor on planned days. On later semesters the students will have learned the project process and the supervision will most often be on the request of the students. It is difficult to make specific frames for supervision, since supervisors and project groups are all different. For further reading regarding supervision see Dahl, Dich et. al. (2010).

3.6 Confidentiality

Some projects include information that for some reason should not be publicly accessible. These could be interviews in, which the respondent wishes to be anonymous, or it might be financial or other sensitive company data that should not reach the public. Talk to your supervisor about how the demand for confidentiality fits together with the demand for precise references. Students cannot leave out references and data because they think these are confident. In cases of confident data the project can be subject to a c*onfidentiality demand*, which means that the university through the supervisors will guarantee that no information will be publicly accessible. Do not sign c*onfidentiality declarations* before you have spoken with your supervisor.

4. References

Christensen, G., Both, E. & Sørensen, P. Ø. (1994). *Mekanik*. Genoptryk af 2. udgave, Fysisk Institut, Danmarks Tekniske Højskole.

Cottrell, S. (2008). *The Study Skills Handbook.* 3rd edition. Palgrave MacMillan

Dahl, A., Dich, T., Hansen, T. & Olsen, V. (2010). *Styrk Projektarbejdet – En redskabsbog til problemorienteret projektarbejde.* 2. udgave. Biofolia.

Harboe, T. (2006). *Indføring i samfundsvidenskabelig metode.* 4. udgave. Publisher Samfundslitteratur

Longhi, T. G. (2009). *Gode råd til udformning af større skriftlige erhvervsøkonomiske opgaver på Syddansk Universitet.* Academic Study Board for Economy.

Rienecker, L., Jørgensen, P.S. (2010). *Den gode opgave – Håndbog i opgaveskrivning på videregående uddannelser.* 3. udgave. Samfundslitteratur.