

**What** do readers in a professional setting look for in documents (e.g., memos, emails, reports)?

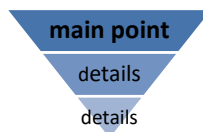
- Concise, clear, tonally appropriate prose
- Key information located in **prominent positions**
- Visually accessible information

**How** do readers in a professional setting read documents?

- **Quickly!**
- Possibly inattentively or with distractions

**Try to organize and format your documents to make them as appropriate to this type of reader as possible.**

- **Reveal structure visually:** use content-specific, descriptive headings (and subheadings for longer documents); include other formatting devices (bullet points, boldfacing, and numbered lists) *when appropriate*; leave enough white space around sections. Headings are a roadmap to the document, identifying key concepts and topics and aiding the flow of information. Informative headings and white space make the contents of your document more visually accessible and attractive, allowing readers to locate and identify information easily. *Judicious* use of bullets and lists (make sure any lists have textual context!) also help readers navigate the text more easily.
- Make sure your tone is appropriate and your word choice understandable to your audience, purpose, and occasion. Keep subjects close to verbs; use descriptive, precise verbs. Eliminate unnecessary wordiness (e.g., “blue in color,” or “due to the fact that” instead of “because”).
- Practice effective framing or set up of paragraphs: include **topic sentences** that summarize main point or preview the topic/contents of a paragraph. Use the “inverted pyramid” or BLUF (bottom line up front) approach—start from the main point down and then provide supporting or amplifying details. Do not bury key point or information in the middle of paragraphs or sections!



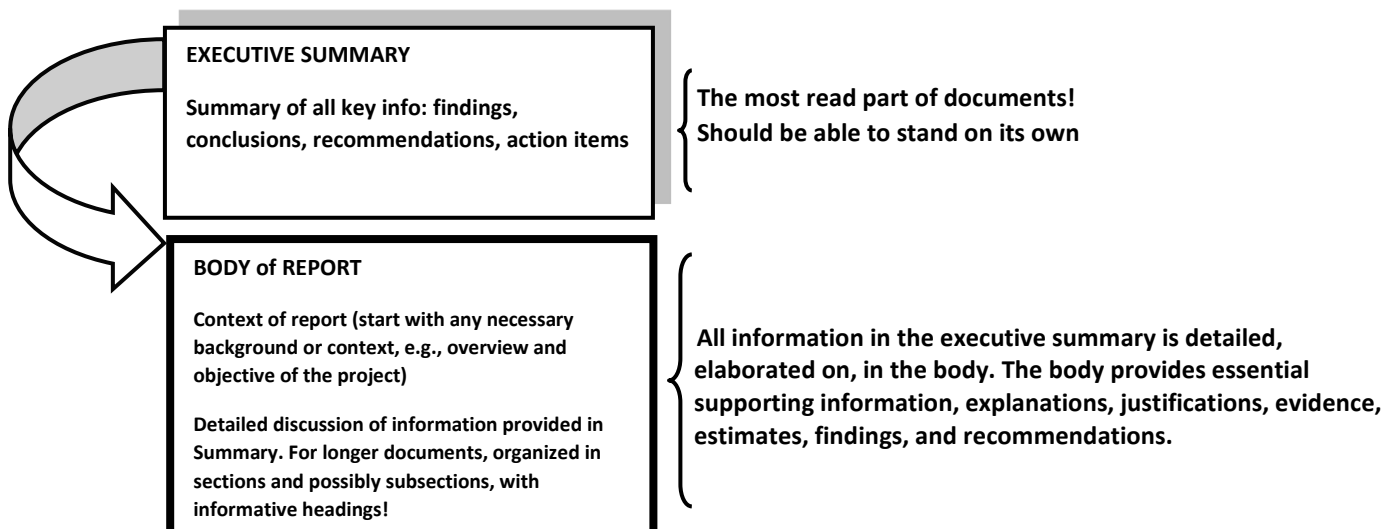
- Help your readers follow your text effortlessly. Be consistent in use of key words and phrases. Include logical transitions. Make thoughtful use of transitional words and phrases (e.g., *therefore, in contrast, however, moreover, likewise, not only . . . , but also*). Use enumeration when appropriate (“the two most significant limitations are x and y.”), and use enumerative words that indicate process or chronology (e.g., “First,” “second,” “next,” “then”).
- **Eliminate ambiguous or vague pronoun references** such as a “this” or “it” that have no clear referent.
- Number and provide a caption for all figures and tables. Cite figures in text. Figures and text need to work together.
- **Proofread carefully.** Typographical errors and mistakes in grammar and mechanics (spelling and punctuation) make your writing awkward and unclear—and make a bad impression. Reading your report aloud to yourself is a good way to proofread more effectively.

## The Executive Summary

**Summary of Executive Summary:** An Executive Summary is a highly condensed version (“in a nutshell”) of the *attached full document*. It contains enough information for the readers to become informed about the main points and recommendations of the longer document *without reading the entire document*.

An **executive summary**, sometimes simply referred to as a “summary,” is placed at the beginning of a document and is aimed at helping readers easily access the main “takeaways” of a longer report and to make decisions. Because it is a concise summation of a report’s contents, the executive summary allows readers at the executive/managerial/decision-making level to quickly grasp the most important information contained in the longer report. A summary can contain a brief overview of the problem or topic covered in the main document and a concise summation of any necessary contextual information. **It must include main findings, conclusions and/or recommendations/action items**. The summary should only include information present and detailed in the main, longer document. Note that

- a summary is **NOT** an introduction to the longer document
- a summary is **NOT** a table of contents; it contains a summation of key ideas, results, conclusions, recommendations/action items
- a summary can include formatting (e.g., bullet points)
- if the material in the longer document is highly technical, and readers with non-technical background are among the audience, then an executive summary should use language that the non-technical reader will find useful
- readers expect all information and points brought up in executive summary to be addressed and expanded upon in longer document. The summary and the longer document/report should correspond to each other, even as they are self sufficient, i.e., each able to stand apart from the other.



### Importance of Topic Sentences in Technical Writing

Effective topic sentences **are particularly necessary in technical, scientific, and professional writing because they “frame,” or set up, the material for readers** and allow the readers to move through a paragraph more easily, with greater understanding and comprehension of the details. Good topic sentences act as signals or “road signs” for readers, telling them where the writer is taking them. Topic sentences can set up a paragraph **in different ways**. They can

- **make an assertion, claim, or recommendation** that will be detailed and supported by evidence in the paragraph.

“The designers were not responsible for the failure.”

“The government deliberately left an important group of stakeholders, the local farmers, out of the entire decision-making process.”

“Choosing X would be too risky for the decision maker.”

“We should ensure that additional safeguards are put in place.”

- **interpret up front data or facts that are** detailed & explained in the paragraph.

“The analysis shows that the decision-maker’s dominating alternative is to choose to collaborate with the Finnish gas provider.”

“The total costs of all major phases of the project were lower than estimated.”

“The experimental results demonstrate that A is more effective at reducing the amount of toxins than B.”

“X is 15% faster than Y under the same conditions.”

- **establish a specific scenario, context or state** that the paragraph will describe.

“The opponents to the X project had different motivations for their opposition, but all agreed that the project would have negative consequences.”

“Some of the literature focuses on simulations of X.”

“The documentation was done sporadically and was incomplete.”

“This study extended our noncontact DCS system into ncDCT for 3-D flow imaging of deep tissue.”

“Because of its adaptability, the technology has great potential for applications ranging from small digital devices to satellites.”

- **set up enumeration of parallel items** that the paragraph will discuss.

“The decision maker faces two significant challenges, X and Y.”

“The project has 4 major milestones: a, b, c, and d.”

“The decision involves 3 significant risks: A, B and C.”