Executive Summary Report Template

Guidelines for writing an executive summary

A) Good to know about executive summariesB) Elements of an executive summary

C) Guidelines for preparing an executive summary in 9 stepsD) Examples of high-quality executive summaries (to be used in your ownWork)

E) References used in this Guideline

A) Good to know about executive summaries

What is an executive summary?

• A short and clear, compelling summary of an expert opinion report (see Guidelines for Writing an Expert Opinion Report) or of any other study (often studies with practical or Political implications).

• An indication of the main points considered and the conclusions reached.• A written, scientific statement in support of a specific position, answer, solution or Recommendation in a concise, clear and coherent form.

What is the function of executive summaries?

• To communicate the main points and conclusions of a study, meeting, discussion, grant

proposal or conference in a short text.

• To inform busy people in executive positions (e.g. managers, politicians, funding officers)

on the status of a scientific issue.

• To indicate points for consideration and to present science-based recommendations.

Who is the audience of executive summaries?

Executive summaries are prepared for a well-educated audience with various educationalbackgrounds. Typical readers have a tight schedule and want to extract key messages fromthe text as fast as possible. Therefore subject-specific language and complex explanationsshould be avoided.

What is the relationship between an executive summary and an expert opinion report?

• Longer expert opinion report texts, with more than 10 pages, should have an executive summary. This facilitates to access the content of the expert opinion report (Guidelines for writing an Expert Opinion Report).

• Executive summaries are provided in other contexts too (e.g. to communicate the

relevant results of studies, discussions, meetings or conferences).

How long is an executive summary?

Executive summaries should be as short as possible, without being as short as an abstract ina research article. One or two pages (of text) is fine, three okay and four pages themaximum. In rare cases, for very extensive studies, executive summaries might be longer.

B) Elements of an executive summary

Short executive summaries usually do not have different sections but only a few paragraphs.However, as sections and subtitles help to structure the text and help to communicate the

ooxWord://word/media/image9.jpegooxWord://word/media/image10.jpegooxWord://word/media/image11.jpegmessage, longer executive summaries should be subdivided into sections.

Structural principles for executive summaries

Argument 1. context and question 2. main arguments

3. answer and implications

Abstract 1. introduction 2. material and methods 3. results

4. conclusion

Problem solution 1. situation (circumstances, conditions) 2. problem (shortcomings, open question)

3. solution (one or several solutions or answers)

4. evaluation (critical appraisal of solutions; is the question answered or the problem solved?)

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| additional  recommendations |  | If recommendations for actions are given in an executive summary,  these are presented at the end. Sometimes bold type is used for  these recommendations. |

In some cases, dependent on topic or the approach of the authorand/or client, definite recommendations are not given but differentoptions with their advantages and disadvantages provided.

An executive summary must be clear, concise & coherent1

Clear • Say exactly what you intend, in a way that is as clear as

possible to the reader.

• Use definite, specific, concrete language.• Use the active voice.

• Put statements in positive form.

• Express coordinate ideas in similar form (parallel construction

of sentences).

• Keep connected words in a sentence closely together (e.g.

subject and verb).

Concise Omit needless words, phrases, or whole sentences. Needless words are those that can be removed without significant loss of understanding.

Coherent Make sure that information elements hold together so that the progress from one point to the next is logical and seems inevitable.

Additional points to consider when writing an executive summary