



RESEARCH IN FOCUS

HOW TO... WRITE AN ACTION RESEARCH REPORT



Getting Started

There is no prescribed format for writing an action research report, as this will largely depend on your intended audience and your educational context, however there are some key elements which are common to most action research report structures. You may find it helpful to look at examples of other reports. An example structure is presented below, but you can adapt this to suit your individual requirements. If you plan to submit your research for publication, it would be pertinent to check in advance if those publications have their own preferred style.

1. Abstract

The abstract is a concise summary of your research, which describes the purpose, methodology and results of the study you undertook. It is usually best to leave this section of the report until the end, by which time you will have had a chance to reflect on the overall process. The abstract needs to create an impact and be easily understood. It is often a good idea to show the abstract to a colleague or someone unconnected with your research once you have written it for clarity. Does it convey the main points, and does it grab the reader's attention? You may find that you have to produce several versions before settling on a version you are content with.

2. Introduction

The introduction sets the scene for your research project. You might want to include details of your specific setting, and how the research question came about. If your research has implications beyond your own setting, you may wish to provide additional context. You can highlight the significance of your research question and detail how you think it will help to improve your practice. This will be the first part of the report the reader will see after the abstract and is where you will establish your credibility as a researcher.

3. Literature Review

In this section, you will introduce the reader to previous research that you have identified in your particular topic area. What research has been conducted in the past? What points of view are put forward? How does this relate to what you are doing? Are there any gaps in the research that has been presented? What are the key themes and arguments that exist? Are there any gaps in the literature? Choose a recognised referencing system when introducing such literature to ensure that you have a consistent approach. This will also help the reader to refer back to any material you have presented. The material you use to support your research needs to be relevant and demonstrate breadth of reading. Think quality, not quantity.

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4. Methodology and work plan

In this section, you would detail how you conducted your research. What methods did you use and why did you choose to do it this way? If your research involved focus groups or questionnaires, did you conduct a pilot to ensure that the questions were clear and easy to interpret? Did this result in any remedial action or revision of original text? Who was involved in your research? Did you have any support for the project, and how was this support deployed? You would also introduce your critical question and highlight what was going to be implemented or analysed. You would also describe the setting and the cohort / groups you were working with in detail to build on what you said in the introduction. What ethical considerations were there when conducting your research, and how did this shape your research design? What steps did you take to ensure personal data was handled appropriately?

This section should help clarify the steps you took to enable someone else to replicate the study should they wish to do so. When did the data collection take place? (you can summarise the key dates, the methods selected, why you chose that method over others, and data collection window). Why did you undertake the study? You would also provide details here of any limitations that you identify with the study - this may relate for example, to timeframes, available resources, access to the cohort you chose to study, gaps in any data you may be using. You can add any templates e.g. questionnaire examples, focus group questions, observation sheets in the appendices. Ensure these are anonymised and respect confidentiality.

5. Analysis / Findings

This section is one of the key parts of your research report. Here you would go into detail about what your research results have shown. How did you analyse the data? If you undertook interviews, you may want to use illustrative quotes. Identify any variables in the cohort/s you were studying. Were the results what you were expecting? If your research involved gathering lots of data, you may want to keep some of this to the appendices. As a rule of thumb, you would normally only add graphs and charts if they help the reader to understand the results more easily. Too many graphs and charts in the main body of the report can sometimes distract from the key messages, so only include if they are necessary. By adding them within the appendices, the reader can refer back to them at their leisure.

6. Conclusions

In this section, you would synthesise your results, i.e. draw on what you have found from your literature review and from the results of your own research. Did your research prove or disprove your original hypothesis? What are the main messages that are coming from your research? What is your interpretation of what happened? What does this mean for you and the subjects of your research?

Further reading:

A range of research related e-books are available to you via EBSCO. Explore what is available via your Professional Learning Passport. Some examples are below:

[A Toolkit for Action Research](#)

ALBER, Sandra M. Published: Lanham, Md, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011. Type: eBook., Database: eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)

[Doing Classroom Research : A Step-by-step Guide for Student Teachers](#)

TWISTLETON, Sam, et al. Published: Maidenhead, McGraw-Hill Education, 2008. Type: eBook. Database: eBook collection (EBSCOhost).

You may find additional useful articles or resources via open source. Have a look at the policy hub on our website for more information www.ewc.wales 'Access to research resources'.

7. Reflections / Next Steps

An important part of the research process, is reflecting on the activity you have undertaken and considering next steps. Consider what the process has taught you about your own practice. What impact has this had on your students / clients / colleagues / other stakeholders? Have any preconceptions been challenged? Is there anything you would do differently as a result of your research activity? What can you take from the process that you will carry forward in your career? It may be that your research has prompted more questions and that you would like to explore further. Is there a need to revisit the research with other groups? Within a different context? Has it provided you with ideas for further research?

8. References

There are various recognised referencing systems that you can use in your report. The most important thing is that you are consistent, and that you appropriately acknowledge sources of material you have used in your report. Plagiarism is serious matter, you need to make sure you acknowledge any work that is not your own e.g. words, concepts, ideas, diagrams.

9. Appendices

Use appendices to add information that supports your report e.g. copies of any questionnaire templates, questions used with focus groups, large datasets and / or graphs, images. These need to be self-explanatory, so you will need to have referred to them in the main report.

10. Dissemination

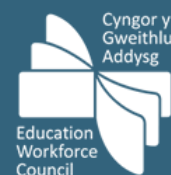
You have done all the hard work, have written your report, and have undoubtedly obtained information that would be of value to colleagues both within your own school / organisation and beyond, and to other stakeholders within education. The next step is to decide how to disseminate your research findings. How are you going to share the findings of your report? Remember - the findings of your report can be shared in other ways too, both online and offline. You need to tailor the approach to the audience you are trying to reach.

The dissemination process does not necessarily have to be limited to presenting the findings of the research itself, it may be about the research process - e.g. how did you find the process? Did you meet any obstacles along the way, and if so, how did you overcome them? What advice would you give to those starting a research project for the first time? Consider how you might help others thinking about engaging in research to learn from your experience. Have a look on our website (www.ewc.wales) in the policy hub at some blogs written by practitioners, where they talk about their experiences of undertaking research '**Research at work**'.

Referencing:

You can find more information about different styles of referencing by visiting the 'help' section of EBSCO (Citation styles).

Have you found any research publications or material that you have think have been particularly useful? If so, let us know! research@ewc.wales



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