



Using Headings, Charts and Graphs

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Discuss the use of headings, charts, graphs for an impressive writing.

Using Headings, Charts and Graphs

Headings and subheadings are an important part of any report. They follow uniform styles throughout, and often use a decimal style to subdivide topics, although some writers prefer not to have numbers and letters in the headings and sub-headings. What's important is to determine the style that you will use, and then apply the format consistently throughout. Examples are included below.

1. Main heading

1.1 Subheading

1.2 Subheading

1.21 Sub-subheading

1.22 Sub-subheading

2. Main heading

2.1 Subheading

2.2 Subheading

3. Main heading

I. Main heading

A. Subheading

B. Subheading

1. Sub-subheading

2. Sub-subheading

II. Main heading

A. Subheading

B. Subheading

III. Main heading

In addition to what you're already keeping in mind, you should also know that headings and subheadings must be grammatically parallel.

Not Parallel	Parallel
1. Selecting a topic 2. The outline 3. How to gather information a. Primary research b. Doing secondary research	1. Selecting a topic 2. Writing the outline 3. Gathering information a. Primary research b. Secondary research

The most important headings are formatted to be the most prominent in the report. For example, the highest level heading might be in a bold font with large bold letters, and an automatic space below the

heading. Medium level headings will be slightly smaller and without the space below. Lower level headings may have only the first letter capitalized.

If you are working in a program similar to Microsoft Word, you will find pre-formatted styles which are available as headers at several levels. You can experiment with these to select the styles that you prefer.

The headers can be left black, like the main text of your document, or you can use one color for headers throughout (perhaps the company color). Just make sure that your use of color is not distracting from the report itself. Remember that you can always stick to black for unity and consistency.

Using Charts and Graphs

Since the report's purpose is to communicate information in the most precise and meaningful way, tables and graphs may be important supplements to the narrative. To be effective, they must be well-designed and clearly executed. They should also be carefully integrated with the text of the report.

There are five basic kinds of statistical graphs, each with advantages and disadvantages. The trick is to match the proper graph to the kind of data you wish to present.

Area Graph (Pie Chart)	Simplest breakdown of percentages.
Bar Graph	Versatile; easy comparison of amounts, subdivisions, relations.
Column Graph	Useful for comparison of related items having two different measurement units (such as profits, years).
Line Chart	Most flexible for graphing and comparing trends.
Surface Chart	Useful for special emphasis on a particular feature within a trend.

How and When to Use Graphics

Graphics like charts, tables, and lists command attention; unless, of course, you have overused them. Correctly used, they give the report a different way of seeing information.

Use graphics in your report:

- If your data is complex and using a table or chart will help the reader understand your point.
- If compiling the data in a table or chart will save the reader time.
- If a list, chart, or table will conveniently collect information the reader may want to refer to later.

Put illustrations near the appropriate text. If you talk about a table or chart, make sure the reader can find it by placing it near the discussion of the point it is to illustrate. To be sure that your graphics help the reader, let each chart illustrate only one point. Also, since the reader shouldn't be expected to

interpret the data for himself, make sure you point out what the table shows—call attention to trends, relationships, totals, increases, and so on.

Things to Remember About Graphics

If the text is crystal clear without the chart, question your decision to use it. Maybe it's not really necessary. Sometimes as a writer we put so much effort into our work that we hate to cut anything out, so you may have to step back to really answer the question honestly. If the text is incomprehensible without the chart, perhaps you are expecting the chart or table to do your work for you. The visual cannot make your point; it can only help you illustrate it.

Be sure to lead the reader into and out of your list, chart, or table by introducing it and concluding it in the text itself. In most cases, if there is an illustration, there should be an explanation. Both should be clear enough to serve the writer's purpose in meeting what he considers to be the needs of his reader.

Here are some other tips:

- Put long, complicated graphics in the appendix. Use bite-size tables and charts in the text.
- Keep tables and charts as brief as possible.
- Signal the reader when a table or chart is coming up.
- Label graphics clearly and specifically.
- Number tables and charts consecutively throughout the report. Do not, however, mix the two.
- Use a graphic only if it will help the reader understand your point.
- Don't interrupt the text with a graphic; lead the reader into it and out of it.
- Point out the significance of the table or chart to the reader.
- Keep the graphic as simple as possible.
- Use white space and labeling to make your graphics attractive; make the reader want to look at them.
- Consider using tables and charts in the appendix as a way to compile and present all your significant data in convenient form.
- Usually both the title and caption are centered above the chart, but any consistently followed method will do.