

Articles and Reports

Articles and reports both discuss a particular topic, but because they have different purposes and are aimed at different readers, the approach is a little different in each case. An article is written for a newspaper, magazine or newsletter and is designed to make a topic interesting for the general reader. A report is usually more formal and detailed because it is written for a particular person (or group of people) with a particular interest in a subject.

ARTICLE

You have been asked to write an article describing your experience of an unusual type of holiday for a students' magazine.

HEADING

FANCY A DOWN-TO-EARTH HOLIDAY?

OPENING
INTRODUCE the
topic in an
interesting way

Are you fed up with lazing on the beach? Do you want to do something a little different this year? Well, there are now quite a number of educational holidays available and I decided to try one of these out.

addressing the
reader directly

I'd always been interested in history so when I saw an advertisement for a week's break which included training in archaeology, it seemed ideal.

USE separate
paragraphs for
different aspects of
the subject

There were eight of us in the group, including a retired school teacher, two American college students and an out-of-work actor. Accommodation was simple but comfortable and the food was all home-cooked and delicious.

giving specific
examples

After some basic training, we were allowed to take part in a dig at a nearby archaeological site. It was a fascinating process and the high spot for me was finding a tiny piece of pottery which was later identified as Roman – 'Beginner's luck', according to the teacher!

quoting

ENDING
overall comment +
concluding remark

I can thoroughly recommend an educational holiday. As far as I'm concerned, learning a new skill beats lying on the beach any day, and I still came home with a sun tan!

It's good to start with a QUESTION

Notes and useful language

CONTENT

An article is usually based on a discussion, a description or a narrative (or it may involve a combination of more than one of these). See the relevant sections in the Writing Bank for more information about these types of writing.

APPROACH

An article should catch the reader's attention and make him or her want to read on. Think about the age group you are writing for and ask yourself how much they might know about the subject and how you can make it interesting for them. With a light-hearted topic, humour is often helpful. You can also make your article more lively and readable by:

- **addressing your readers directly** (*Did you know ...? What would you do if ...?*)
- **using a personal approach** (*Personally, I can't imagine anything worse!*)
- **giving specific examples and quotations** (*As Mrs X explained, '.....'*)

GENERAL STRUCTURE

- Give your article a heading or headline which makes the subject clear and also catches the reader's attention.
- Divide the article into paragraphs to help the reader follow the argument.
- Begin with an interesting introduction – an example, perhaps, or a question.
- End with an overall comment or concluding remark.

HEADINGS

Use your imagination to make the headline catch the reader's attention. Here are some of the ways writers do this in this book:

- a dramatic word or phrase: *Freezing!*
- a summary of the story: *My Lone Walk to the North Pole; Rescue from the rapids*
- a question: *What's the big idea? Just a normal day?*
- a surprising fact: *Seven banks a day are robbed in LA; You're already well equipped to prevent crime.*

See the sections on Descriptions, Discussions and Narratives for detailed information about structure and useful language.

Practice

- 1 You have been asked to write an article which will appear in a guide to your town or city for English-speaking visitors. Write about the sports and leisure activities which are available.
- 2 Your school or college wants to publish an article giving advice and encouragement to new students in its English language newsletter. Write the article.

REPORTS

The Student Services Manager at your school or college has asked you to write a report on the library facilities and to suggest any improvements that could be made.

HEADING

Report on College Library Facilities

INTRODUCTION

In order to prepare this report, I visited the college library on several occasions and interviewed the librarians and a number of students.

saying how you have gathered the information

SUBHEADINGS (or number each point)

General

The library has a welcoming atmosphere and most people said that it was easy to find your way around. It is well decorated and well-lit and the only problem is that there are not quite enough tables and chairs for everyone at busy times.

mentioning a negative point

quoting

Books

There is a very good selection of books for all subjects but according to the librarians there is sometimes a waiting list when a particular book has been recommended by a teacher. The catalogue system is rather complicated and surprisingly it doesn't appear to have been updated recently.

reporting an impression

Newspapers and magazines

The range of newspapers and magazines is excellent and these seem to be well used.

Conclusion

The library facilities are very good, on the whole, but I would recommend providing additional copies of popular books, supplying a small number of extra chairs, and improving and updating the catalogue system.

generalising

summary and recommendation

alternative heading

From: A Student
To: The Student Services Manager
Subject: College Library Facilities

Notes and useful language

APPROACH

A report should be practical and business-like. It should present the necessary information as clearly as possible so that the reader can follow it easily, and it should express an overall opinion at the end. You can simply begin with a heading or you can write the report in the form of a memo to a particular person or group if you wish.

STRUCTURE

- Give your report a clear, factual heading.
- Divide the report into paragraphs or sections to deal with separate aspects of a subject and use numbers, letters or subheadings to make this clear.
- Start by saying what the report is about and/or how you gathered the information.
- End with a conclusion which gives a summary of the situation (and a recommendation if necessary).

INTRODUCTION

The aim/purpose of this report is to ...

This report looks at ...

In order to prepare this report, I visited/interviewed/studied ...

REPORTING IMPRESSIONS AND FINDINGS

It seems/appears that ...

Most people/The majority of people seem to/tend to ...

It is interesting/surprising/strange that ...

Interestingly, Surprisingly, Strangely,...

QUOTING

According to X, Y said/felt/mentioned that ... + reported speech

GENERALISING

In general, On the whole,

SUMMING UP

In conclusion, To sum up, On balance,

MAKING A RECOMMENDATION

In my opinion/view,

I would recommend (+ -ing)

Practice

- 1 Your English penfriend is doing a project on the subject of television and has asked you for information about the different TV channels and the most popular programmes in your country. Write a report.
- 2 You belong to an English students' club which has a meeting room and a small library of books, videos and tapes. The club has recently received a small grant. You have been asked to write a short report on the club's facilities and to suggest the best way in which to spend the money.