

**Style Specification: A Guide to Formatting
Conventions for the DP1 Report**

mcaulf 3/13/08 3:33 PM

Comment: This is my title. I have formatted it in 14-point, boldface type and centered it. No further embellishment is necessary.

Writing Across the
Curriculum Staff
March 14, 2008

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Comment: Your name, section information, and date go here.

Introduction and Overview

mcaulf 3/13/08 3:44 PM

Comment: My first main section heading, formatted in 16 point boldface. If I were to number the headings, this would be 1.0

Technical documents are judged by how completely, clearly, and quickly they deliver information to a reader. Skillful use of paragraphing, sentence structure, and the proper use and definition of technical terminology will help you create an informative document. Careful attention to the formatting of the report will improve its readability and make information easier to find.

Most organizations that produce professional documents have a style specification, style sheet, or other document that determines the overall look of reports and other written material. Although specific conventions vary, guidelines help to ensure consistent format within a particular community of writers. The guidelines we use are based on The Mayfield Handbook of Technical and Scientific Writing

https://web.mit.edu/course/21/21_guide/www/home.htm

For a complete discussion of any topic mentioned in this document, follow the link to refer to the Mayfield Handbook.

Global Document Format

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Comment: This is a second-level heading. It is formatted in 14-point boldface type. If it were numbered, it would be 1.1.

The following conventions allow for a professional look for reports. Writers can achieve a clear, legible page layout using most generally available text editing, word processing, or document production programs.

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Comment: I am about to list several bulleted items and have provided context and rationale in these sentences.

- Text should be single-spaced, left-justified (ragged right margin). Leave one extra line space between paragraphs.
- Use a single-column layout.
- Font should be standard, 11- or 12-point. You may use a second typeface or type style for headings, captions, and other special text. Use these special effects sparingly.

Headings

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Comment: This is a third-level subheading. It is formatted in 12-point boldface type. If it were numbered, it would be 1.1.1.

Headings should stand out clearly from the running text of your report. Levels of headings should be easy to identify; the reader should easily distinguish high-level information from details and examples.

You may indicate levels of headings through the use of type size and style. For a short document such as the DP1 report, which is limited to 2500 words, too many levels of headings can be confusing. Use just three levels. Table 1 gives examples of the formatting styles for three levels of section headings.

Table 1. Heading Levels and Styles

UNNUMBERED HEADINGS	NUMBERED HEADINGS
Main Heading	1.0 Main Heading
Second-Level heading	1.1 Second-Level Heading
Third-Level Heading	1.1.1 Third-Level Heading
Another Third-Level Heading	1.1.2 Another Third-Level Heading

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Comment: I have numbered my table and given it a title. It is formatted in 11-point bold to keep it from blending in with the report's body text. I formatted my table headings as small caps to make them stand out from the text. Notice that I'm keeping the number of type styles to a minimum and using them consistently.

For more information on headings, see:

https://web.mit.edu/course/21/21_guide/www/headxsh.htm

Paragraphs and Logical Units of Information

Readers of technical writing tend to skim documents, read them out of order, and refer to sections that contain information they particularly need. Because readers have such a variety of styles of using a document, they rely on writers to arrange information by topic and to establish a clear progression of ideas.

If you craft a paragraph's first sentence carefully, that sentence can establish context for the rest of the information in the paragraph and announce the structure for presenting that information. These first sentences may be referred to as **topic sentences**, contextualizing statements, or point sentences. Spend extra time on first sentences, and make sure that paragraphs are unified, focused, and coherent.

Use **bulleted and numbered lists** sparingly, and do not use them to substitute for full discussions or explanations. Lists should be introduced with a short paragraph that explains and supplies context for the items in the list. Make sure that the items in the list belong together and that they are grammatically parallel.

For example, you might begin each item with a boldface term and one or more sentences explaining the term. You might also list a series of complete sentences or phrases that fit together logically.

For a complete discussion of topic sentences:

https://web.mit.edu/course/21/21_guide/www/topic-s.htm

For more information on the role of paragraphs and sentences, see:

https://web.mit.edu/course/21/21_guide/www/paragraf.htm

https://web.mit.edu/course/21/21_guide/www/sentence.htm

For more information on bulleted lists and other units of information, see:

https://web.mit.edu/course/21/21_guide/www/layout.htm

Guidelines for Graphics

Your report may include schematic drawings, graphs, equations and tables. In some cases you may also use pseudocode examples, if they are kept to a minimum (no more than 10 lines) and not used as a substitute for clear explanations. Note that pseudocode should be formatted as a graphic and explained in the text of the report.

The following guidelines apply:

Emphasize the important detail:

- Label the axes of graphs.
- Specify the units of measurement you are using.
- Avoid distracting lines, pictures, or special effects.

Integrate graphics and text:

- Summarize the intention of the graphic in the body text of your report.
- Place the graphic as close as possible to a description of what it illustrates.
- Use figure numbers and captions so that readers can switch attention between text and graphics easily.

Use labels and captions:

- Table headings appear above the information.
- Figures and equations have captions, which appear below the information.
- Use a separate numbering scheme for tables, figures, and equations.
- Captions do count against your 2500-word limit, but a brief (10-word) caption help the reader skim your report.

For more information on graphics, see:

https://web.mit.edu/course/21/21_guide/www/grfxfig.htm

Footnotes

MIT style does not use footnotes. Any text included in footnotes counts against the 2500-word limit. Use the IEEE style of in-text citation to document your sources. In a short report, all the information should support the description and justification of your design. Either include information in the body of your paper or omit it.

For more information on IEEE citation, see:

https://web.mit.edu/course/21/21_guide/www/doc-ie3.htm