

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING STUDENT LEARNING

For several years Jayne has been keeping a record of the most frequent weaknesses she sees in her students' formal reports. She shares this list with her students while they are working on drafts and finds that most students can eliminate these problems themselves once they know to look for them. Though your own students may need help in different areas, this list may give you ideas for keeping them on track:

- **Sources are improperly documented.** This happens more with primary research, but it happens with secondary sources, too. At the draft stage Jayne has seen reports filled with facts, statistics, even direct quotations, without one citation.
- **“Presentation of data” section is inadequate.** Often they are very brief, yet this normally should be one of the longest section of the report, since this is where all the “proof” is given.
- **Visuals are not adequately discussed in the report.**
- **The wrong type of visual has been chosen** (e.g., a perspective graph; a pie chart when a bar chart would be better).
- **Parts of the Introduction are missing.**
- **The background/history section is too brief** (though it would normally be based on the “Problem” section in the proposal, it must be more in depth).
- **Letters/memos of transmittal are sketchy.**
- **Conventions have not been followed in preparing front matter.**
- **The Executive Summary/Abstract does not accurately reflect the content of the report.**
- **Greater claims are made for questionnaire results** than technically is true (e.g., “Our survey of 200 students **proves** that students at Kent State University think this is a great idea” – Use “**supports...**”).
- **The “Conclusion” contains new data** instead of being an objective summary of all that’s come before.
- **Not enough information is given in “Recommendations.”**
- **Headings are not informative** in the “Background” and “History” sections.
- **Material in the appendix** is not presented properly.
- **Reports follow the example in the book too closely**, despite being specifically warned against it (for example, they use very similar headings, even when not appropriate, or pattern their language after the example).
- **Poorly constructed paragraphs.**
- **Awkward, wordy sentence structure; grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors.**
- **Pagination mistakes** (people often don’t check the final printout!).

If your students are writing reports as a group, check Chapter 13 for tips on making the collaborative process more productive.