

# Tips for Writing an Effective Executive Summary



## 1 Know Your Readers

Understand who will receive the report. The executive summary should give an overview of the detailed report that resonates with every executive officer who reads it, so it is important to understand your organization's culture. Some organizations may be more cross-functionally collaborative, while others will be more compliance-oriented. Not every stakeholder will be a technical subject matter expert. For example, if your report is going to the CFO and you have IT audit findings, make sure that you don't have to be an IT expert to understand what the issue is.

## 2 Cut the Fluff

The executive summary should be 1-2 pages. Aim for brevity as much as possible. Consider the best way to summarize each point, as there will be more takeaways in the detailed report. Wherever possible, use numbers and percentages to help drive points home. Eliminate any unnecessary descriptive adjectives and adverbs.

## 3 Explaining It to the Company

Whether the audit report is presented to members from operations or IT, the executive summary should be written so that every individual can easily understand the terminology and sophistication level of the writing. A good rule of thumb is to try to explain every point in a way that all levels of experience and expertise at your company would understand.

### Tips

- Stay away from big words. If someone has to have a dictionary to understand your report, this hurts your case.
- Avoid acronyms and functionally esoteric terms not everyone at the organization will understand.
- For important ideas or concepts that are likely to be missed, try using analogies. When tested and done right, this not only facilitates understanding, but can help drive the point home.
- Use bullet points wherever possible.

## 4 Make It Digestible

For any key point, whether it is a big, scary finding or a positive one, bring the reader's attention to the information as concisely as possible. Decide on your most important takeaways or messages, then leverage visual formatting to draw your audience's eyes to each message.

### Tips

- Tables can be more effective in illustrating a finding than a block of text.
- If you can use a number or percentage to describe a fact, do so.
- Circle or highlight the key points you want to convey, as well as bold, underline, italicize, or use color.