

Suggestions for Formatting your Reports

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1 Preface

When we are writing an article, typically we want to format it into a “nice look”. What is a nice look depends on what is the reason of writing the article. For example, the formats of an article on a sports magazine and another article on a academic journal should certainly be different. Below I just want to share my “personal opinions” about how to format a report (in particular, a technical report). Certainly some suggestions come from my personal tastes, but I believe these suggestions will help you make your report look more formal and professional. These guidelines should also apply to most reports or documents you need to write in the future.

Discussions in any format are always welcome.

2 Guidelines

1. Margins should be large enough. Typically it is preferred that a margin is at least 2 cm.
2. Add page numbers to your report. If you have no specific reason of changing it, put the page number at the bottom of a page and place it in the center (just like this article).
3. The font you use for the main text should be identical throughout the whole report. When your report is written in both English and Chinese, stick to one font for English and one font for Chinese.
4. The font size of the main text should also be identical throughout the whole report.
5. Centering your figures or tables. Do not put them at the left of the page.
6. If possible, do not put sentences or paragraphs beside a figure or table. Let the two sides of a figure or a table be empty.
7. When using enumeration items (1, 2, 3, ...) or bullets, indent all the lines belonging to the same item or bullet equally. For example, do what this article does rather than
 7. When using enumeration items (1, 2, 3, ...) or bullets, indent all the lines belonging to the same item or bullet equally.
8. When there are mathematical symbols in your report, make them in the style of mathematics. In particular, be aware of the following things:
 - (a) When there is a symbol denoted by an English letter, make it italic. For example, write $a + b = 3$ rather than $a + b = 3$.

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- (b) When there is a subtraction, write $-$ rather than $-$. For example, write $a - b = 3$ rather than $a - b = 3$. The same thing applies to the negation operator. For example, write $a = -3$ rather than $a = -3$.
 - (c) For multiplications, write \times rather than $*$.
 - (d) For an exponent, write it as a superscript rather than using $^$. For example, write 10^2 rather than 10^2 .
9. Do not copy and paste your spreadsheet (e.g., MS Excel) tables to your text editor (e.g., MS Word) without doing any formatting.
 10. The style of texts, figures, tables, etc., should be consistent throughout the whole report.
 11. For statistical plots, do not forget the names, units of measurement, and labels of axes. For any figure, do not forget the caption.
 12. Do not let the axes and caption occupy too large an area of a statistical plot.
 13. Do not plot an histogram as a bar chart. They are different!

3 Conclusion

Hope you will find these suggestions useful!