How to Write an Entry For the Executive Summary
Overview:

The following rules will guide you when writing the Executive Summary. The techniques indicated are outside the scope of our style guide but describe the target language we are looking for.

Determine the primary subject (subject always comes before verb)

The subjects OIT, service group, department, a person, or *we* should <u>never</u> be used as the primary subject of a sentence. The primary emphasis should always be placed on *the goal accomplished*.

Example one (**below**) places the emphasis on the pronoun *we* – rather than the noun *preview groups*. **Example two** keeps the subject *preview groups* central to the thought.

Present the most important subject in the sentence first, and then describe what happened to that subject.

- **Example one:** *We identified the preview groups from each department* (incorrect)*.
- **Example two:** *Preview groups were identified from each department* (correct).

Limit prepositional phrases:

Prepositions describe a subject's relative location in space or time. They are often used to provide additional information to a sentence's primary premise.

Prepositional phrases either begin or end with the words *of, to, with, at, by, from, in, until, on, above, below, around, behind, within, etc.* Prepositions can be overused, resulting in convoluted language.

In **example one,** the author is aiming for accuracy however the abundant overuse of prepositions makes the entry difficult to read.

If descriptive items must be included, attempt to include those items in separate sentences within the communication.

- **Example one:** *The technologists at Ohio University in the department of App Support within the Office of Information Technology in Grosvenor Hall across the road from the Convocation Center, responded to tickets from angry faculty within Russ College of Engineering* (Wordy and hard to read).
    - List of prepositional phrases in this sentence:
        - At Ohio University
        - In the department
        - Of app Support
        - Within the office
        - Of Information technology
        - In Grosvenor Hall
        - Across the road
        - From the Convocation Center

- To tickets
- Within Russ College

- **Example two:** *The App Support technologists responded to angry faculty from the Russ College of Engineering* (Less accurate however the message is clear).

While the second example does not provide the same level of details – it gets to the point and is less likely to confuse your reader.

Note: *not all prepositions are bad. The author* <u>must decide</u> *which information is the most important for the sake of clarity and effectiveness.*

Do not use adverbs (at least limit them)

Adverbs are used in colloquial speech to modify a verb, adjective, or another adverb. When writing, adverbs can diminish the impact of a sentence, by making the diction convoluted or wordy.

- **Example one:** *When writing, adverbs can actually diminish the impact of a sentence* (wordy).
- **Example two:** *When writing, adverbs can diminish the impact of a sentence* (strong and concise).

Write in past tense. What was achieved? Not what is happening, or will happen…

In most cases, the Executive Summary will be reporting on events that occurred in the prior month. The executive summary is not for making predictions about what we *think* will happen in the future.

However, if a process started in the past month, but is ongoing – then that information *can* be presented in present tense.

- **Example:** *Azure multi-factor authentication migration* <u>concluded</u> *for the final group of guest accounts on March 31.*

Approximately 60 words or less (like the following blurb):

The goal is to display all significant progress on all initiatives in a single page. The reader should be able to quickly skim across the language and get an adequate summation of the prior month's activities.

Sometimes there may be too many details, which requires a larger entry, however the author should always strive to "sum-it-up."

Use plain language (don't be flashy)

Do not aim to impress with overly complicated diction. Research indicates that overly complex language (and "big" words) can be perceived as non-credible (Ashton 2020).

Write the Executive summary as if the reader has never heard of the project before.

Avoid internal jargon or slang

- **Example one:** *Mac (adequate)*
- **Example two:** *Apple Mac (better)*

Write out acronyms

- **Example one:** *MS Teams* (shorthand)
- **Example two:** *Microsoft Teams* (correct)
- **Example three:** *Azure MFA*
- **Example four:** *Azure Multi-factor authentication*

Note: Space permitting. If the entry is overly long, acronyms may be acceptable in certain situations.

Use simple sentences where possible:

- **Compound sentences** often require a conjunction (such as "and"); an independent clause (can exist alone as its own sentence); and a dependent clause (an incomplete phrase that supports the independent clause).
- **Complex sentences** require at least two independent clauses and are often joined by a comma.
- **Simple sentences** are just one independent clause:
  - **Example:** *The final stage of contract negotiation is underway* (succinct and simple).

Use semicolons for complex lists:

When there are items in a list that require multiple words (i.e., College of Fine Arts, College of Arts & Sciences for example) use a semicolon instead of a comma. This will improve clarity.

- **Example:** *Office of the President; Internal Audit; Advancement; University College; Student Affairs; WOUB; OUPD; George Voinovich School; Mail; Moving; Transportation and Parking Service; Facilities; Printing Services; Bursar; and Auxiliaries.*

Use the full names of buildings:

- **Example one:** *Grosvenor* (incorrect)
- **Example two:** *Grosvenor* West (correct)
  Example three: *the library* (incorrect)
  Example four: *Alden Library* (correct)
- **Example five:** *Irvine* (incorrect)
- **Example six:** *Irvine Hall* (correct)

Do not refer to specific departments within OIT (or even OIT itself)

Those viewing the Executive summary are not interested in *who* was doing the work. The use of "OIT" is also not necessary since the executive summary is an OIT report – and those viewing will be well aware of the report's origin.

Link out to important information:

Any instance (where more information is easily accessible on a webpage), should be linked out.

Do not change the descriptions:

Project descriptions should not change over time. Occasionally a change will be made, but those changes must first be vetted by the Campus Engagement manager.

Further reading

Ashton, Rob. (2020) *Are big words clever? Finding fluency in your writing*. Emphasis. https://www.writing-skills.com/are-big-words-clever-fluency-in-writing