

Writing a JRF report

This document summarises the key requirements of a JRF-funded report. It should be read by the research team at the very start of the research project, and again before writing begins. It should be read alongside JRF's [Writing style guide](#).

These guidelines are designed primarily with research projects in mind. If your project is of a more practical nature, e.g. describing the process and outcomes of a development project, you should discuss the writing with your programme manager at JRF. However, this guide will still cover the main principles when you come to write up your research.

IN BRIEF

Many JRF project teams are contracted to write a short, accessible report. The report highlights key findings and conclusions, and summarises the research. It is usually published alongside a *Findings* summary of the research. See the [Writing Findings](#) guide.

Your audience

Before you start to write the report you should be clear about who you hope will read the report and what you want them to learn from it (or what actions you might want them to take). Being aware of your audience will help you write a more focused report.

Content

Ensure your content is current, relevant to your audience and their needs, and that it is selective where necessary. From experience, we know that most projects generate much more and richer data than can ever be captured in a short JRF report. Overall, audiences for JRF reports are busy people, who skim and scan for the information they are interested in (often this is to help them do their jobs better, whether they are civil servants, practitioners, policy officers or chief executives). With this in mind, be selective about the themes you focus on in your JRF report, bearing in mind the wider policy or practice context. Less is often more!

- **Length:** aim for 15–20,000 words (including appendices). Most people, especially those we aim to reach, have little time to read long, detailed reports.
- **Style:** write in an accessible style that will make your research comprehensible to the non-specialist. Readers will not necessarily be familiar with terms that are everyday language for specialist researchers.
- **Structure:** always include an executive summary. If required, a discussion of your methodology should be put in an appendix, with only a brief summary included in the body of the report.
- **Formats and file types:** see [Supplying text and graphics](#) for how to send your text files, graphs, tables, maps, etc.

STRUCTURE

JRF reports are published in PDF format, so keep preliminary pages to a minimum – readers need to get into the body of the text as soon as possible. Include these items in the following order:

- Title page (including a summary blurb)
- Contents page
- Executive summary
- Introduction
- Chapters
- Conclusions/Recommendations for policy and practice
- Notes and References
- Appendices
- Acknowledgements
- About the authors

Title page

Lists the full proposed title and subtitle, plus all authors.

Titles should not be finalised before the report is sent to JRF. The Communications Department team will finalise the title with you once the report is received.

JRF house style is for clear and concise titles that are descriptive rather than quirky – e.g. *The housing choices of young people* rather than *Moving on*. The subtitle, if needed, can explain in more detail the direction of the study – e.g. *Older people's housing choices: Exploring the links between age, poverty and housing conditions*. Titles are of critical importance on the web. A clear title containing search 'key words' will help ensure that your document is ranked well by search engines like Google, and will help your reader find it among the clutter of their results pages.

Agree the ordering of author names among your project team. Use this order on the final draft.

Blurb about the report

This should be a brief introduction to the research.

Please supply a draft blurb when you submit your report to JRF. The Communications Department/Publishing Manager will edit the blurb as necessary, and agree the edited version with you. The final version will appear on page 1 of your report, and on JRF's website. The blurb should be about 150 words long, following these guidelines:

Style: factual, plain English, short sentences.

Paragraph 1: summarise the report in one phrase, e.g. 'How a disadvantaged background affects young people's experience of higher and further education'.

Paragraph 2: a couple of sentences, introducing the report's content and its 'reason for being', i.e. its timeliness/policy importance/uniqueness.

Bullet list: the main contents of the report (in terms of what subjects are covered and how they are explored).

Contents page

This lists all the chapters in the report.

Executive summary

All JRF reports *must* have an executive summary of around 1,500 words. The executive summary comes at the very front of the report. It provides a shortened guide to the report's key findings and policy/practice implications, for those who are too busy to read any further, and will help contextualise the report for those who read on. It is best to write the executive summary *after* you have written the rest of the report.

Write in short paragraphs, and not as a list of bullet points. The report's main chapter headings could be used as subheadings to help structure the executive summary.

The executive summary is similar in content to the *Findings* summary (see [Writing Findings](#) guidelines), but has a different structure. A *Findings* is a list of 'key points' on page 1, followed by three pages of supporting text. The *Findings* may omit some issues that are covered in the executive summary.

Introduction

This section might include a short account of your methodology, the policy context in which your report has been written, and how it is relevant to that context, and any other wider background information that is relevant.

Chapters 1 to XX

The main body of the report is *not* designed to be a record of everything you have done and found out. It is not a complete documentation of your project.

It should give enough information (research and evidence) and context to make your key findings and policy conclusions credible and comprehensible.

Include plenty of short subheadings – these help readers navigate around a chapter and get to grips with the direction of your discussion. Do not number subheadings.

Include a summary of conclusions at the end of each chapter; this is a useful 'quick reference' for readers.

Conclusions/Recommendations for policy and practice

The section on implications and/or recommendations is particularly important. It is the section that many busy readers will turn to first (or straight after reading the introduction). For this reason, it is worth taking time to seek advice, in confidence, from relevant people who work closely with the policy or practice arenas you hope to address, and to use them as a sounding board.

Your conclusions and policy/practice implications may have been discussed in the main text, but you should still include them as a separate chapter at the end of the report. Only include conclusions and recommendations that are backed up by the main body of the

report. No new, unsupported ideas should be introduced in the conclusions chapter.

When writing, keep in your mind who these policy or practice implications are for. If relevant, include examples for practitioners, local government, central government, voluntary sector etc. 'Implications' for policy or practice will be appropriate to all reports. However, it will not always be appropriate (depending on the nature, scope, strength of the research and resulting evidence base) to propose policy or practice 'recommendations'. Where your report does provide recommendations, these should be specific and evidence-based, and ideally 'tested out' on relevant people (as mentioned above).

References

JRF uses the Harvard (author/date) system. See the [Writing style guide](#) on JRF's website for more information.

Appendices

Any technical background information that you feel is useful to the reader should be included in the appendices. This might include:

- more information on methodology;
- more information on the interviewees or case study areas;
- information on the political or historical context of the study.

Appendices may be published separately, to keep down the size of PDF files.

Notes

If you need to use notes, these will be collected at the end of the report in one section. Please do not use the Word-automated system for note creation as it is extremely difficult to edit, and errors are easily introduced. Instead type a full-size number in the text where the indicator is to appear. Notes should start at 1 and be numbered consecutively throughout the report.

TEXT FEATURES

Figures and tables

Clear, descriptive figures and simple tables illustrating the main points help to make the report more accessible. For information on what format to use, please refer to [Supplying text and graphics](#) on JRF's website.

As well as describing what the graphs are, captions should, where possible, draw out the main point that the graph is making, e.g. 'Poverty rates among one-parent families fell considerably between 1972 and 1981'.

Note: Most JRF reports are PDF-only. So illustrations need to be understandable in black and white, when they are printed from the website. Use hatched lines rather than colours to distinguish lines on graphs.

Photographs and maps

Use photographs and maps sparingly, and only if they add something to the report that cannot be described in words. They should not be included to highlight or illustrate the accompanying text.

Case studies

If your report includes case studies it is useful if they are presented in separate boxes from the rest of the text, so that they are easily found by the reader.

Text boxes

Text 'break-out' boxes can be useful for text that is relevant to the general discussion but not part of it.

Quotes

If your research included interviews, include some interesting and relevant quotes from the participants in the final report. Keep

quotes short and to the point – make sure they support or illustrate points you are making in the text. Aim to use one quotation to illustrate each separate point.

Anonymity

It is your responsibility to ensure that your report (particularly use of names, case studies, quotations or illustrations) complies with the commitments you have made to protect the anonymity and/or confidentiality of research participants.

Tenses

Use the present tense when describing/reporting what you believe to be the case generally (in the population as a whole); use the past tense where you are describing what you found among a particular group of people.

Style of writing

JRF's [Writing style guide](#) available on JRF's website gives comprehensive information on JRF's preferred writing style.

Frequently asked questions

How long should the report be?

Between 15,000 and 20,000 words.

What format should I use?

Supply the text in MS Word, with tables included. If figures are created in Excel, the original excel file should be provided. For more information see [Supplying text and graphics](#) on JRF's website.

How much editing is done to my report?

Once the report has been approved by your JRF research manager, it is 'copy-edited' (checked for punctuation, grammar and sense) and the page proofs (the 'designed' pages) are proof-read.

Will I see proofs?

Yes, you will be sent typeset proofs to check before the report is published. It is not possible to make major changes at this stage, as there will be a tight schedule to ensure the report is published on time. Making changes at a late stage also increases the risk of errors.

Can I have some printed copies of my report to distribute myself?

JRF does not supply printed copies for distribution by the project, but you are welcome to print off copies of the final PDF and distribute these yourself.

Why don't you print reports?

See 'Publishing information', below.

Publishing information

Publisher

JRF decides on a suitable publisher according to who can reach the intended audience best. JRF is usually the publisher but also works with co-publishers, such as the Chartered Institute of Housing. JRF is the official publisher of all summaries.

Format

JRF uses its own branded design for all its reports.

JRF publishes all of its research reports in PDF format for free download on its website. Very few reports are printed.

JRF has found that printed copies of its research reports are much less popular and less accessible than web-based copies. Recent years have seen a surge in PDF usage of the reports, and a rapid decline in printed copy sales. Printed copies for sale are therefore not the best way to disseminate the research evidence JRF has funded. JRF now redirects resources away from printed reports and towards:

- free PDF reports online; and
- promoting research 'messages' through a more targeted mix of:
 - summaries (print and PDF);
 - reports and summaries online;
 - events, such as seminars, where print copies of summaries are available;
 - press work and publicity.

JRF may sometimes choose to print for sale particular types of reports, particularly reports for specific audiences, e.g. service users, those without computer internet access. For example, the Chartered Institute of Housing publish JRF projects that result in practice manuals in the field of housing and related issues, and these are usually printed and available for purchase. They are also published online on the JRF and CIH websites for free download.

Process

- A process called ‘communication planning’ at JRF begins while you are writing up the report. Staff from JRF’s Communications, Policy & Research, Media and Events departments work together from the start of programmes in communications planning groups. The purpose of the groups is to plan and manage the appropriate level of communications activity across programmes and projects.
- The groups develop messages, specify the project aims, assess the external environment, identify potential partners, list target audiences and finalise dissemination options.
- Once your research manager has approved the final draft of your report it is passed to a publishing manager. The publishing manager oversees the production of the report, but the day-to-day work of editing, proofing and printing is done out of house, either by a co-publisher, or by a publishing production company, and they will liaise with you directly.

Publication date

JRF takes a strategic approach to the timing of publications in order to launch research at the best possible moment. Publication of each report will depend on a number of factors, including: external factors (current debates, government deadlines, external events), links with other projects, internal JRF factors (what else is being published, amount of time needed to produce the report and *Findings*) and availability of project holders.

The report and *Findings* are published on the same date.

Press, marketing and events

The Media (press) and Marketing and Events teams are involved in communications planning. The Media team will organise JRF media plans and press releases, decide on timing and look for good outlets to publicise the research. They may also help you with media training where required. University press offices should direct media queries to JRF’s Media office.

The Marketing and Events team will organise any JRF-led events, looking after audiences, invites, speakers, venues and presentations, including the best way to market/raise awareness of

the communications activity. They can advise you on anything to do with your presentation or event.

JRF also has mailing lists (print and email), which can be used to disseminate your research in a targeted way.

OTHER JRF GUIDES are available at
www.jrf.org.uk/funding/current-funding-holders

Writing style guide

Writing Findings

Supplying text and graphics