How to write a JRF report

These guidelines tell you the main things you need to know when you’re writing a report for JRF. We suggest you read them at the start of your project, and again before you start writing your report, along with JRF’s Writing style guide.

Reports are usually published alongside a four-page Findings summary. See How to write JRF Findings.

JRF reports are published online in PDF format.

Audience
Being aware of who you’re writing for – knowing what you want them to learn or what actions you want them to take will help you write a more focused report.

Content
From experience, we know that most projects generate much more data than can ever be captured in a short JRF report. Be selective about the themes you focus on in your JRF report, bearing in mind the wider policy or practice context.

• **Length:** It should be possible to sum up the key information from your project in 15–20,000 words (including references).
• **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 you need to include some of the detail of your methodology, this can go in an appendix.
• **Formats and file types:** see Supplying text and graphics for how to send your text files, graphs, tables, maps, etc.

**STRUCTURE**
Please include these items in the following order:

• Title page (including a summary blurb)
• Contents page
• Executive summary
• Introduction
• Chapters
• Conclusions
• Notes and References
• Appendices (if required)
• Acknowledgements
• About the authors

**Title page**

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

JRF’s content team will agree the title of your report and Findings with you, so please don’t finalise it before submitting your report.

JRF house style is for clear and concise titles that are descriptive rather than quirky – e.g. *Housing choices of young people* rather than *Moving on*. If necessary, a subtitle can be used to give a little more information but the title should be clear enough to stand alone, without relying on a subtitle to explain the meaning.

Titles are of critical importance on the web. A clear title containing search keywords will help ensure that your document is ranked well by search engines, 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 your final draft.

**Blurb about the report**

This brief introduction to the research goes on the front page of your report – see the example on page 1 of these guidelines.

Please supply a draft blurb of no more than 150 words when you submit your report to JRF. The content manager will edit the blurb as necessary and agree the edited version with you. The blurb should be in factual, plain English, following these mobile- and web-friendly guidelines:
1: Summarise the report in one phrase, preferably a question (e.g. ‘What do white working-class people think about community cohesion?’).

2: A couple of sentences summarising the whole blurb.

3: Bullets showing more detail on main findings of the study.

Mention its 'reason for being' – i.e. timeliness, policy importance, uniqueness – if there’s space.

Contents page
This lists all the chapters in the report. The clearer the headings in your report, the easier it is for readers to find what interests them.

Executive summary
All JRF reports must have an executive summary of up to 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.

Whereas your Findings summary (see Writing Findings guidelines) highlights what you have found out in your study and the implications of these findings, the executive summary should summarise the content of your report. Please start it with one or two sentences to set the context.
**Introduction**
This section might include a short account of your methodology, the policy context in which you have written your report and how it is relevant to that context, and any other suitable background information.

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

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

Please start each chapter with a short introductory paragraph, like the one in the executive summary.

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.

**Conclusions**
The section on implications and recommendations is crucial. It is the section that many readers will turn to first, or straight after reading the introduction.

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.

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 based on evidence.
References
JRF uses the Harvard (author/date) system. See the Writing style guide on JRF’s website for more information.

Appendices
Appendices are not essential but may be an appropriate place to put any technical background information that you feel is useful to the reader.

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.

Notes
If you need to use notes, these will be collected at the end of the report in one section. Notes should start at 1 and be numbered consecutively throughout the report. 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. You can mark this in bold or highlight it to differentiate it from other numbering.

TEXT FEATURES

Figures, tables, photographs and maps
Clear, descriptive figures and simple tables help to make the report more accessible. For information on what format to use, please refer to Supplying text and graphics.

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’.

Illustrations need to be understandable in black and white, because some people print off reports from our website.

Use photographs and maps if they are a more effective way of explaining something than text. They should not be included purely to illustrate the report.
Please make sure you have permission to use any figures, photos and maps from other sources, and credit these accordingly.

**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.

**Quotes**
If your research included interviews, include some interesting and relevant quotes from the participants in your report. Keep quotes short and to the point – make sure they support or illustrate points you are making in the text. Please indicate the source of your quotes. It's fine to use a description like '21-year-old man, living in a share-ownership house' to maintain confidentiality (see below).

**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**
The [writing style guide](#) available on JRF’s website gives comprehensive information on our preferred ‘active’ writing style.

**Publishing information**

*Publisher*
JRF is usually the publisher but occasionally 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.
We publish all of our research reports in PDF format for free download on our website. Very few reports are printed, although some are available to buy via a ‘print on demand’ company.

Instead, we disseminate messages from the research evidence we have funded through a more targeted mix of:

- summaries (print and PDF);
- reports and summaries online;
- events (our own and others), such as seminars and conferences, where print copies of summaries are available;
- press work and publicity, including social media.

Please supply your report text in Microsoft Word, with tables included. If your report includes figures, please do not embed these in the Word document, but provide the original, editable files. For more information see Supplying text and graphics.

Process
Once your research manager has approved the final draft of your report it is passed to one of our content managers, who will oversee the production of the report..

You will be sent 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.

The time it takes to produce a JRF report varies, depending on:

- length – if a report is longer than the length we recommend, it will take longer to produce;
- complexity – the report takes longer if there is a high number of figures or other visual elements in the report;
- deadlines – if we know when a report is coming in, we can schedule it and book people to work on it, but if there are unexpected delays this is much harder to do;
• turnaround – once the report is in production, the content manager/editor will give you a schedule, which includes key dates for checking proofs and answering queries. Please stick to this schedule to ensure we can finish your report by the publication date.

On average we allow four weeks for the production of JRF reports. They can be done more quickly in exceptional circumstances.

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.