Following are some very general, tip-of-the-iceberg suggestions for report writing. More detailed references are given at the end of this document.

1. General Comments

1. The title page should contain your report title, name, ID number and e-mail address, the course and assignment number, date, and names of your reviewers.

2. Include an Abstract (Executive Summary), Table of Contents, Introduction, Literature Review, Body (Methodology, Results, Analysis – what you did, how it turned out, what it means), Conclusion or Summary, References, and Appendix.

3. Use page numbers!

4. Students often refer to Section 2, 3, 4 and so on, but then don't use 2., 3., and 4. in their paper. I don't care whether you number your sections or not, but BE CONSISTENT!

5. Learn the difference between then (time gone by) and than (comparison between objects). *Then* and *time* both contain 'e' and *than* and *comparison* both contain 'a' if that helps.

2. Acronyms

Don't assume that your reader knows everything that you do. Even if your reader does know much of your content, it is good practice to be rigorous about your terminology.

1. Say the acronym in words: Computer Mediated Communication
2. Follow the *first* use of the words by the acronym in brackets: (CMC)
3. Add the term to your Glossary (Appendix), in alphabetical order by acronym.
4. For the balance of the paper, just use the acronym.

The above does not apply to the Abstract (or Executive Summary), as it is meant to be read independently of the paper. For the Abstract, you should not use acronyms at all. Ditto the Title of your paper.

Example:

Our research concerns social interactions in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) among university researchers. We found that faculty members using CMC were able to ...

Glossary

API application programming interface
CMC computer mediated communication. The use of technology for social interaction.
GUI graphical user interface
MVC model, view, controller. A framework for GUI components.

(Note: Use the singular - interface, not interfaces. Describe the term in words if necessary.)

3. Abstract

1. State what was done. Use the past tense.

2. State the major result. Use the past tense.

3. Present one major explanation.

4. Point out one significant implication.

Example 1:

Abstract
Detailed growth paths of networks were measured as the number of nodes was increased. Mathematical analyses demonstrated that under these conditions, the networks did not grow randomly but tended to grow straight. It appears that a resistance to bending may be the cause of the intrinsic tendency for relatively straight growth. The natural straightness of growth may be an important developmental determinant of network patterns.

Example 2: <link>

4. Table of Contents

One page is perfect.

5. Introduction and Conclusion

The Introduction tells the reader what you are going to do; the Body of the paper tells the story; the Conclusion tells what you did. All pieces should be the same, with different viewpoints.

6. Literature Review

Document previous academic work found from quality sources, such as the ACM, IEEE, MISQ and ISWorld. Do not include random web hits from unreliable sources. Provide a variety of references and sources. Consider actually reading *hardcopy* journals and books! The Davis Centre Library has some great *real* stuff.

7. Tables and Figures

1. Be consistent! Use the same words in your tables and figures that you use in your written commentary. It is very difficult to follow a description of your pictures when the words don't match. (i.e. ‘server’ versus database versus products, all used to describe the same thing)

2. Write at least a one-paragraph description for each table or figure, rather than just slapping a diagram in the middle of your paper. Walk the reader through the information in the diagram in a structured manner - generally, top to bottom, left to right.

8. References

1. Don't use (LF99); use (Lawrence and Fine 1999). My preferred format is found on the MISQ website at www.misq.org/roadmap/standards.html under Bibliography Format. If you don't like that, use a standard ACM or IEEE journal format.

2. Use an alphabetical Bibliography (or References) section by last name of author. See the MISQ examples.

3. When referencing web sites, you must document the author (if known), the site name in full and the date of access as well as the URL. If no author is given, insert the reference in alphabetical order by name of website.

Example:

References
Pidduck, A. 'Acronyms', http://www.math.uwaterloo.ca/~apidduck, October 2000, accessed November 21, 2000.
'Software Engineering Methodologies', http://www.uwaterloo.ca/~cs480, December 2000, accessed January 14, 2001.

4. Another common mistake is to give a huge list of references at the end of your report, but no pointers from the body of your work to the Bibliography. You can't just bump up your References section with a ton of documents! You actually have to read and 'refer to' these materials. (Thus the name 'References'!)

For every item in your References (or Bibliography) section, you must have at least one reference in the body of your report. For every reference in your report, you must have a full annotation in your References section.

Example:

Report Body
All terminology should be documented in a Glossary. (Pidduck 2000)

References
Pidduck, A. 'Acronyms', http://www.math.uwaterloo.ca/~apidduck, October 2000, accessed November 21, 2000.

9. Anne's Appendix

Abstract Example 2 from (Reich and Benbasat 2000):

The establishment of strong alignment between information technology (IT) and organizational objectives has consistently been reported as one of the key concerns of information systems managers. This paper presents findings from a study which investigated the influence of several factors on the social dimension of alignment within 10 business units in the Canadian life insurance industry. The social dimension of alignment refers to the state in which business and IT executives understand and are committed to the business and IT mission, objectives, and plans.

The research model included four factors that would potentially influence alignment: (1) shared domain knowledge between business and IT executives, (2) IT implementation success, (3) communication between business and IT executives, and (4) connections between business and IT planning processes. The outcome, alignment, was operationalized in two ways: the degree of mutual understanding of current objectives (short-term alignment) and the congruence of IT vision (long-term alignment) between business and IT executives.

A total of 57 semi-structured interviews were held with 45 informants. Written business and IT strategic plans, minutes from IT steering committee meetings, and other strategy documents were collected and analyzed from each of the 10 business units.

All four factors in the model (shared domain knowledge, IT implementation success, communication between business and IT executives, and connections between business and IT planning) were found to influence short-term alignment. Only shared domain knowledge was found to influence long-term alignment. A new factor, strategic business plans, was found to influence both short and long-term alignment.

The findings suggest that both practitioners and researchers should direct significant effort toward understanding shared domain knowledge, the factor which had the strongest influence on the alignment between IT and business executives. There is also a call for further research into the creation of an IT vision.

10. Anne's Bibliography

Reich, B. H. and I. Benbasat. "Factors That Influence the Social Dimension of Alignment between Business and Information Technology Objectives," *MIS Quarterly* (24:1), 2000, 55-89.