

English 231: Professional Writing

Guidelines for Executive Summaries

An [executive summary](#) is a professional writing genre commonly attached to proposals, business plans, and research studies. It is intended for executives—hence the name—who need to be able to quickly access all the relevant information in a document.

Executive summaries do not function like abstracts, introductions, conclusions, or any other writing genre you've likely encountered:

- Executive summaries come at the beginning of the document and are clearly marked as separate from the rest of the document.
- Executive summaries do not simply summarize the main argument. They cover all aspects of a document, serving almost as a document in brief.
- Executive summaries tend to be roughly 5-10% of the word count of the full document.
- Executive summaries, despite their name, do not merely summarize. They also make an argument for why the research is useful and valid.
- Executive summaries are carefully written and rewritten, rather than cut and pasted.

Here are some tips for writing your executive summary:

- Read over your entire proposal after you've written it.
- Isolate the most important points in your proposal and rewrite them to be as brief and clear as possible.
- Write out brief summaries of each section.
- Combine the important points and brief summaries together in the order they appear in your document. The executive summary should function almost like an outline of your proposal, so make sure everything is in the right order.
- Re-read your summary and proposal together to ensure consistency.
- If you make revisions to your proposal after you've written the executive summary, make sure those changes are reflected in the executive summary.
- Use strong, positive, and active language.