



Quick Tips

Basics of Good Evaluation Reporting

1. *Consider the needs of your target audience(s) even before you begin your evaluation.*

- Other than yourself, for what group(s) are you conducting the evaluation?

Begin your evaluation by writing down who will see or hear your report. In other words, keep your audience in mind as you plan, design, implement and communicate your evaluation.

- What does the individual, group or organization say it wants from you?

Many funders, stakeholders and other interested parties tell you what they want to know. Some you need to ask. Others need to be told what findings are important. If they specifically tell you what they want, be certain to gather and communicate that information.

- Will you collect information that answers the audience's "so what" question?

If decision-makers and those who fund your program want to know what difference your program makes, try your best to answer their questions.

2. *Give your audience important details of the evaluation.*

Provide enough technical detail so your audience can determine the merit of the evaluation.

- **What** – Your central evaluation question
- **Why** – Your purpose for the evaluation
- **Who** – Your source(s) of information, including sample or census size and response rate
- **How** – Your data collection methods
- **Where** – The locations from which you collected data
- **When** – The time frame you collected the data

If your audience may be critical of your evaluation and the program it examines or if your audience has special technical expertise, provide greater detail and specifics. For example, if you did a survey of program participants, document how you drew your sample, the size of the population and the percent of people who responded.

3. *Use caution in reporting findings and drawing conclusions.*

Remember the type of data you collected and how you collected it helps determine what you can eventually conclude about it.

Quick Tip 14 - Basics of Good Evaluation Reporting continued

Do not claim that your program caused a specific result unless you have experimental evidence in support of that claim. Discuss the results you have documented that are associated with your programming, but not necessarily caused by it.

If you say you used a random sample, that means you used a random numbers table or random number generator to draw your sample. Use of the word “random” implies its correct technical meaning – which is that each case had the same chance of being selected. Random does not mean “just some cases I chose.”

Do not use superlatives or adjectives in general, such as “very” or “extremely” when you discuss evaluation findings and conclusions. It makes you appear to be an advocate of the program, rather than an advocate of the evaluation.

Remember when you use the word “significant” with some audiences, it could imply that you used hypothesis testing and statistics. If you haven’t used significance testing, your credibility could suffer with these audiences. To be cautious, use the term “significant” only when you have used significance testing.

4. *Have others read or listen to your report and give you feedback before you create the final version.*

When you think you are finished with your report in whatever format you have selected, give the report to someone who is unfamiliar with the content and context. Give them a brief description of why you created the report and what the goals of the reader of the report are. Ask them these questions:

- Is this report easy to read (or listen to)? Is it easy to understand?
- Do the charts and tables in this report communicate well or are they confusing? What are the main points that you understand from them?
- How can I improve this report?
- In what other formats and venues should I communicate this information?

Then, improve your report by making changes that reflect their feedback.

For additional reading, see Pearsall, T. (1997). *The Elements of Technical Writing*. Needham Heights, MA : Allyn and Bacon.