Writing better reports – a helpful checklist

Messages, strategy and structure		✓or X
1. Your purpose	Is it clear? Will the reader know why they are reading it?	
2. Your key messages	Do you know what they are, and have you delivered them first? The what before the why?	
3. The most likely questions	Identified and answered them?	
4. Actions you want the reader to take	Are they clear and easy to find?	
5. Informative headings	Frequent and helpful to the reader?	
6. Got any stories?	Use clear examples or case studies, they can help the reader to get your message.	

Language and tone		✓or X
7. Everyday language	1. Have you been as straightforward as possible and used mainstream language?	
	2. Are you confident your language does not get in the way of your meaning?	
	3. Have you explained any technical terms?	
8. Active voice	Have you put who or what is taking action first?	
9. Powerful verbs	Are you doing words doing? Have you banished 'zombie endings' like words that end in -tion, -sion or –ment?	
10. **Easy to read sentences**	Are they an average of 15 to 20 words per sentence (around 25 is about the limit)?	

Presentation		✓or X
11. Your layout	Does it help the reader get to the messages quickly and easily?	
12. Graphs and visuals	Add meaning, clearly labelled and easy to understand?	
13. Error free	Have you cooled your brain, gained distance and then checked your document through?	

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