1.27 Terms of reference

This constitutes a definition of the task; your specific objective and purpose of writing. Even if you don't include this as a heading, it is a vital process to go through in your planning.

You need to ask yourself:

- What exactly is your report going to be about?
- If it is group work, who exactly is responsible for what?
- How long have you got? What is your task timescale?
- Why are you writing the report? What exactly are the assessment criteria?
- Who are you writing the report for? Are you actually playing a role? What does your reader want to see?

Example terms of reference

These are the terms of reference of an Australian study into IT implementation.

The terms of reference of the study are:

To prepare a strategy for the development of research in information technology (IT) in Australia over the next 10-15 years.

Scientific 1. To make recommendations for research in IT disciplines including computer science, software engineering, computer engineering, digital communications and information systems that will advance those disciplines and strengthen their contribution to the economic, social and scientific welfare of Australia: a) to determine the degree to which a strong fundamental research base is required in all fields of information technology research in Australia and to recommend on future support for this research.

b) to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Australian IT research in an international context and to recommend necessary policy or funding changes.

Social and Economic 2. To assess the contribution of basic and applied IT research to the Australian information industries. 3. To evaluate the benefits of Australian IT research for Australian industry and for the well-being of Australian society, and to develop strategies to increase its contribution to both.

Education and Training 4. To characterise the current education and training of people engaged in IT research in the public and private sectors, and to identify any appropriate changes and their priorities.

Implementation 5. To identify methods for implementing its recommendations and strategies.