Guidelines for Writing an Executive Summary

An executive summary is a concise summary of a business report. It restates the purpose of the report, it highlights the major points of the report, and it describes any results, conclusions, or recommendations from the report.

Moreover, an executive summary should be aimed at a particular audience, one that is interested in and wants to learn more about the purpose—or message—of the main report.

Also, the audience should be able to acquire the information it needs without having to read the whole report.

An Executive Summary Should…

• Be presented as a document that can stand on its own;
• Be one to three pages, depending on the length of the report;
• Be written in a formal tone, avoiding the use of first person pronouns (I, we, our, etc.)

When Writing an Executive Summary, Refer to These Guidelines:

• Clearly state the purpose of the report. Remember that your audience may not have much time, so they should know this information immediately.
• Present the major points in the same order they are written in the report. Organization is key for communicating your message. Also, avoid introducing information that is not addressed in the report;
• Summarize the results, conclusions, or recommendations made in the report. Inform your audience quickly and thoroughly instead of having them guess;
• Use headings as needed, but phrase them differently from those in the report. This will keep your summary organized while avoiding redundant language;
• Format the summary in the same way as the report;
• Reread the summary carefully and ask yourself, "Is my message clear? Did I include key recommendations? Could my audience peruse this without missing the main point? Would I be interested in the full report based on this summary?"
• Proofread and edit;
• Have a non–business person read the summary—a friend, relative, spouse. How did she/he react? What parts were confusing or unclear? Her/his reaction might be similar to that of a business person. Revise as necessary.