# Chapter 15: Progress Reports

## Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, readers will be able to do the following:

1. Describe the purpose and key functions of progress reports in professional contexts.
2. Identify the typical components of a progress report, including completed work, current tasks, upcoming tasks, problems encountered, and an overall assessment.
3. Differentiate between formats and organizational strategies for progress reports, including time-based, task-based, and topic-based structures.
4. Compose a clear and professional progress report that addresses both specialist and nonspecialist audiences, using appropriate structure, tone, and formatting.
5. Revise a draft progress report for clarity, organization, and completeness, using a checklist to ensure inclusion of required sections and effective communication.

## Introduction to Progress Reports

Progress reports are written to inform interested parties about the progress you've made on a project over a duration of time. The need for a progress report varies based on the circumstances, but in general, you write progress reports when it takes a few months or longer to complete a project.

## Functions and Contents of Progress Reports

Progress reports communicate the current status of a project to invested parties. These reports provide a snapshot of where things stand and allow all parties to stay informed, address challenges early, and ensure alignment as the project moves forward. A well-written progress report typically includes the following key information:

* **Completed work:** A summary of the tasks or milestones completed since the last report.
* **Work in progress:** A description of the tasks currently underway and their estimated completion time.
* **Upcoming tasks:** An outline of what remains to be done, along with timelines and responsible parties.
* **Problems or unexpected issues:** Any challenges, delays, or unplanned developments, along with explanations proposed solutions.
* **Overall project status:** A general assessment of how the project is progressing in terms of goals, deadlines, and deliverables.

In addition to sharing information, progress reports have several important functions:

1. Reassure **stakeholders** that the project is advancing as planned.
2. Provide **insight** into preliminary findings or early project outcomes, helping readers understand the work in context.
3. Invite **feedback**, allowing stakeholders to review the progress and request changes or clarifications as needed.
4. Highlight **concerns**, giving the writer a chance to address issues before they escalate, and helping the team stay proactive.
5. Encourage **accountability**, helping the writer stay on track by setting clear goals and maintaining a timeline.
6. Enhance **professionalism**, demonstrating that the writer is organized, communicative, and committed to project success.

By clearly communicating progress and challenges, these reports contribute to the transparency and efficiency of any collaborative project.

## Timing and Format of Progress Reports

In a year-long project, for example, customarily three progress reports are provided, after three, six, and nine months. Depending on the size of the progress report, the length and importance of the project, and the recipient, the progress report can take the following forms:

* **Memo or email:** A short, informal report to someone within your organization
* **Letter:** A short, informal report sent to someone outside your organization
* **Formal report:** A formal report sent to someone outside your organization

## Organizational Patterns for Progress Reports

The recipient of a progress report wants to see what you've accomplished on the project, what you are working on now, what you plan to work on next, and how the project is going in general. To report this information, you combine two of these organizational strategies: time periods, project tasks, or report topics.

### Time Periods

A progress report usually summarizes work within each of the following:

* Work accomplished in the preceding period(s)
* Work currently being performed
* Work planned for the next period(s)

### Project Tasks

Practically every project breaks down into individual tasks.

*Table 1: Project Tasks—one organizational approach to progress reports*

| **Project** | **Individual Task** |
| --- | --- |
| Writing a report | * Studying the assignment * Selecting a topic * Identifying the audience of the report * Narrowing the topic * Developing a rough outline * Gathering information * Writing one or more rough drafts * Documenting the report * Revising and editing the report draft * Typing and proofreading the report * Putting the report in its final package |
| Developing a task management application | * Gathering user requirements * Designing the user interface * Setting up the backend * Implementing core features * Testing functionality * Deploying the application |

### Report Topics

You can also organize your progress report according to the work done on the sections of the final report. In a report project on developing a task management application, you would need information on that topic. For example:

Topics to be covered in the final report:

* User needs and system requirements
* UI/UX design strategies
* Backend architecture and database setup
* Security features and compliance
* Testing and deployment plans

For each of these topics, you'd explain the work you have done, the work you are currently doing, and the work you have planned.

A progress report is actually a combination of two of these organizational strategies. The following outline excerpts give you an idea of how they can combine.

*Table 2: Progress Report Outlines*

| **Progress Report A** | **Progress Report B** | **Progress Report C** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Task 1   * Work completed * Current work * Planned work   Task 2   1. Work completed 2. Current work 3. Planned work   Task 3   * Work completed * Current work * Planned work | Work Completed   * Task 1 * Task 2 * Task 3   Current Work   * Task 1 * Task 2 * Task 3   Future Work   * Task 1 * Task 2 * Task 3 | Topic 1   * Work completed * Current work * Planned work   Topic 2   * Work completed * Current work * Planned work   Topic 3   * Work completed * Current work * Planned work |

The following illustration shows an example of the project-tasks approach with subheadings for time periods.

**User Interface (UI) Module Development**

This report summarizes progress on the UI module for the task management application, with a focus on usability, accessibility, and responsive design.

**Previous period**. We completed initial UI mockups for the dashboard, task list, calendar view, and settings screens. These designs were reviewed internally and refined based on early feedback regarding navigation and layout. Following this, we began implementing components using React and Tailwind CSS. A shared component library was established to ensure visual consistency.

**Current period**. We’re refining the UI based on usability testing, including improving color contrast for accessibility, reorganizing the sidebar for clearer navigation, and adding tooltips for frequently used features. We’ve connected the dashboard and task list components to the backend API and begun responsive testing across screen sizes. Updates are being added to our design system documentation.

**Next period**. Next steps include a second round of usability testing with external users (March 5-7), implementing dark mode preferences, and finalizing accessibility updates per WCAG guidelines. We aim to release the UI module to staging by March 15, pending final testing and compliance review.

The following example shows a progress report organized by project tasks.

**WORK COMPLETED**

As of this time, I have completed the majority of the research and development work for the UI module of the task management application. I am currently compiling sections of the final report. Below is a breakdown of the work I have done so far.

**Component Design**. In the design section of my report, I have included a detailed overview of the interface components, including the dashboard, task list, calendar view, and settings screens. These designs are based on initial user research and internal usability feedback, and they now reflect accessibility best practices.

**UI Implementation**. The section describing the front-end development is complete. I have built and styled all major components using React and Tailwind CSS, and I have created a shared component library to promote consistency and reuse across the application.

**API Integration**. In the section on backend integration, I have documented how the UI connects to the application’s API. I have explained how task data is retrieved, updated, and displayed dynamically. The dashboard and task list are now fully functional with real-time data.

**Accessibility and Testing**. I have finished drafting the section on accessibility and usability testing. This section covers the results of two rounds of usability tests and outlines the changes made to improve color contrast, navigation, and responsiveness. I have also summarized the ongoing work to meet WCAG 2.1 AA standards.

## Other Parts of Progress Reports

In your progress report, you also need the following.

* an introduction that reviews the purpose and scope of the project
* a detailed description of your project and its history
* an overall appraisal of the project to date, which usually acts as the conclusion.

### Introduction

Review the details of your project's purpose, scope, and activities to aid recipients who are unfamiliar with the project, who do not remember certain details, or who want to double check your approach to the project. For example:

I am now submitting to you a report on the progress that I have made on the development of your company’s new task management application. Immediately following the January 15 kickoff meeting, out team began work on the project in accordance with the software development plan.

The introduction can contain the following:

* Purpose of the project
* Specific objectives of the project
* Scope, or limits, of the project
* Date the project began; date the project is scheduled to be completed
* People or organization working on the project
* People or organization for whom the project is being done
* Overview of the contents of the progress report

### Project Description

In most progress reports, include a project description to review the details of your project for the recipients.

**Project Description**

Below is a review of the purpose and scope of this project.

**Purpose**. This software development project was initiated to build a lightweight, user-friendly task management application aimed at helping small teams organize their daily work. The client requested an application that supports task creation, assignment, prioritization, and progress tracking in a collaborative environment. The goal is to increase team productivity through better task visibility and streamlined communication.

**Scope**. This report focuses on the design, development, and deployment of the application’s MVP (Minimum Viable Product). The project is broken down into the following areas:

* User requirements and planning
* UI/UX design
* Frontend and backend development
* Security and compliance
* Testing and deployment

### Conclusion

The final paragraph or section usually reassures audiences that all is going well and on schedule. It can also alert recipients to unexpected changes or problems in the project.

**Overall Appraisal**

The development of the task management application is progressing well and remains on schedule. Most core features—task creation, assignment, filtering, commenting, and permissions—are functional in the staging environment and meeting performance benchmarks.

The main outstanding item is the real-time notification system, pending user feedback from beta testers due March 10. This is not expected to impact the timeline.

No staffing changes have occurred, and project costs are slightly under budget. One minor accessibility issue with calendar navigation has been identified and is scheduled for resolution in the next sprint.

Barring any major issues during the March 15 security review, we expect the deliver the MVP by the April 30 deadline, possibly ahead of schedule.

Sincerely,  
Steven C. Crosswell  
Project Manager, EchoByte Solutions

## Revision Checklist for Progress Reports

As you reread and revise your progress report, watch out for problems such as the following:

* Make sure you use the right format. Remember, the memo format is for internal progress reports; the business-letter format is for progress reports written from one external organization to another. (Whether you use a cover memo or cover letter is your choice.)
* Write a good introduction. In it, state that this is a progress report, and provide an overview of the contents of the progress report.
* Make sure to include a description of the final completed project.
* Use one or a combination of the organizational patterns in the discussion of your work.
* Use headings to mark off the different parts of your progress report, particularly the different parts of your summary of work done on the project.
* Use lists as appropriate.
* Provide specifics. Avoid relying on vague, overly general statements about the work you've done on the final report project.
* Address the progress report to the real or realistic audience—not your instructor.
* Assume there will be nonspecialists reading your progress report. But don't avoid discussion of technical aspects of the project—just bring them down to a level that nonspecialists can understand.

## Attribution

This chapter is revised from the first edition of *Open Technical Communication*, Chapter 2.5: “[Progress Reports](https://alg.manifoldapp.org/read/open-technical-communication/section/732cb3dd-26de-4732-a854-4184dd2fae86)” by David McMurrey, which is openly available under a Creative Commons Attribution license.

The content in Chapter 2.5 of the first edition of *Open TC* was originally sourced and revised from David McMurrey’s *Online Technical Writing*, section titled “[Progress Reports](https://mcmassociates.io/textbook/progrep.html),” which is openly available under a Creative Commons Attribution license.

## AI Assistance Notice

Some parts of this chapter were brainstormed, drafted, and/or revised in conversation with ChatGPT 4o and Google Gemini 2.5 Flash. All AI-generated content was reviewed and revised as needed by a human author.