The Executive Summary

An executive summary is a report, proposal, or portfolio, etc in miniature (usually one page or shorter). An executive summary contains enough information for the readers to become acquainted with the full document without reading it. Usually, it contains a statement of the problem, some background information, a description of any alternatives, and the major conclusions. Someone reading an executive summary should get a good idea of main points of the document without becoming bogged down with details.

Executive Summary VS Abstract

1. An executive summary differs in length from an abstract — that an abstract is shorter.
2. Its purpose is to inform the reader of the points to be covered in the report. Covering no more than a page in length, the executive summary is longer and is a highly condensed version of the most important information the full document contains.
3. Both the executive summary and the abstract are independent elements rather than a part of the body of the document.
4. Both are placed at the beginning of the document.

Function of Executive Summary

1. With the possible exception of the conclusion and recommendation, the executive summary is the most important part of a report.
2. It should be the best-written and most polished piece of the document: This is because many readers may only look at the executive summary when deciding whether or not to read the entire document.
3. In some companies, the executive summaries are distributed so that employees are informed as to what information is available, and interested readers may request the entire document.
4. An executive summary will be read more frequently and by more people than the full document.

Readers of Executive Summary

Three types of readers:

1. Those who want a full picture but won’t check the details (they might read the executive summary, some of the body, the conclusions, and the recommendations).
2. Those who read everything (they read the appendices, all the data, the calculations, etc.).
3. Those who are in executive positions, wish to be kept informed on what is going on in the company, and will say “yes” or “no” to a project (they will read the executive summary, the conclusions, and the recommendations).

Nature of Executive Summary

1. Executive summary is a condensation.
2. Omit any preliminaries, details, and illustrative examples.
3. Include the main ideas, the facts, the necessary background to understand the problem, the alternatives, and the major conclusions.
4. Written summary must be brief and concise.
5. Do not take a few sentences from key sections of the document and string them together.

Nature of Executive Summary

6. Go over the entire document and make notes of the important elements.
7. Create a rough draft of the summary.
8. Polish what have been written until it is smooth without unnecessary wordiness.
9. Do not include any introductory or transitional material.
10. Ensure that the executive summary is accurate and representative of the full document.
11. It should not be misleading, but it should give readers the same impression as if they had read the entire report.