General Guidelines for Applied Math and Stats Co-op Work Term Report

It must be stressed that the work report is an academic paper and is a work term requirement above and beyond any duties of employment. The employer is not obligated to give you time to write this report. In many cases, part of your work responsibilities will be to produce another report for your employer's use. Depending on the requirements of your supervisor, such a report may possibly serve as your work report for the university, however, more typically, it will need to be modified somewhat in order to meet the criteria for a university work report.

The topic of the report may be just about anything relevant to your work term duties. For example, it could be a thorough description of a project with which you were involved, a survey of methods you used in your work, or an analysis of a particular area or function of the institution. However, given that this is a mathematics and statistics program, your report should contain a significant quantitative element. Your work report should not be simply a chronicle of what you did on your job, nor simply a description of some process. Good reports provide some critical analysis of the topic. For example, if you are writing about a procedure used by the institution, your report might address some of the following questions. What is good about this procedure? How does it compare to others? Are there ways it can be improved? How would that be achieved? etc.

Here are some of the criteria on which your work report will be assessed. In terms of audience, you should write the work report for an intelligent, mathematically-educated reader. This means that you can assume the reader is familiar with basic mathematical and statistical methods but not necessarily with the acronyms and cultural jargon used at your place of work. A clear and concise description of your procedures is sufficient and preferable to a long-winded explanation of the fine detail, unless it is particularly relevant to the report. In terms of layout, the report should be divided logically into sections. After a title page and submission letter (addressed to me, indicating where you worked, which work term it was for you, who your advisor was, etc.) the report should have a table of contents and possibly a list of tables and/or figures if there are many of them. Following this should be a short (less than a page) summary of the entire report. A background or introduction section should follow the summary and should provide the necessary information for the reader to appreciate the relevance of the topic and its context. The main body of your report should end with a section detailing conclusions and/or recommendations. Your report should be written in a mature style. Sentences should be well-formed and paragraphs should be topical and typically start with a sentence introducing the topic. Figures and tables, if present, should be well-annotated and
have captions fully describing them. They should be referenced in the text itself. The length of the report is not too important, but most reports are somewhere around ten to twenty pages of text.

Sometimes students work with confidential information which cannot leave the institution, but wish to write a work report dealing with this information. Work reports must be handed in to me for marking, thus if the employing institution does not wish to release the information (even just to me temporarily for marking purposes), you will need to write a report on some other topic. Sometimes the report uses but does not rely on the actual confidential information (for example if the report is about the process of analyzing such data rather than the conclusions drawn from the specific data) then it may be possible to alter or censor the confidential information for the work report. You will need to obtain permission from your employer in this case.

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