THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Site Visit Reports for Engineers

Making the visit and writing up the site report

Engineering students may visit companies outside the university to learn about 'real life' examples of business and engineering management. In such reports students are often required to 'write up' their observations and findings from a site visit.

What is the purpose of a site visit? What are common features of site visit reports? What are some tips for both getting the most out of your visit and writing up your results?

Before your visit

A key is to prepare for the visit to the report location and a good idea is to do some preliminary research on the operations of the plant / company.

1. Use the internet, company reports, and books to investigate some of the primary processes.
2. Think about what you already know about the company, list as much information and work from there.

During your visit

The purpose of visiting a 'real-life' example of engineering is to gain a better sense of your field at work.

During your visit try to be actively engaged in what you are experiencing

The following tips may help you make the most out of your visit.

TIPS:

1. Ask questions when you have the opportunity. Staff involved in presenting the operations of the company are likely to expect questions, and are usually more than happy to accommodate.
2. Prepare some questions before you visit, but then modify them where possible.
3. Use question asking periods to ask any questions that might help with the writing up of your assignment.

A further good habit to get in to is taking notes during your visit. Use any practical opportunity to record any impressions / observations you have of **all** aspects of the visit. Group the notes under headings.

Some notes you might later review might not be directly related to writing up your report, but extra notes have a way of helping you write yourself into a report. A further benefit is that your notes and impressions are fresh and immediate – you don't have to rely on your memory to recall information at a later date.

Site Visit Report Checklist

Make sure before your site visit you have:

- ❑ Read up on the site you are visiting
- ❑ Checked the website of the company for relevant information
- ❑ Prepared a list of questions to ask staff
- ❑ Read any assessment information BEFORE you visit the field
- ❑ Prepared a notebook for making notes as you go with headings prepared.

Writing up your site visit report

Site visit reports may vary from subject to subject, but there are some general features. While you should always work from any course information you have been given, many site visit reports tend to include some or all of the following sections: an **executive summary**, an **introduction**, a brief **overview** of the location, a **description of processes** at the plant (e.g. chemical, machinery), a section where **observations** and **reflections** on the plant are discussed, and sometimes **recommendations**.

Reflection / Observation

When writing reflections/observations of your visit, it is not appropriate to make general statements such as "*I had a really good day*" or "*The operations seem effective*". The language is subjective and unnecessary. Such impressions may leave your lecturer thinking "so what?"

The aims of reflection / observation are:

- To make links between theory and practice: what you've been doing in your course, what you've read and what actually goes on in industry.
- To evaluate the operations of the plant against certain criteria (e.g. technology, efficiency of process), and discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of what you observed.
- To demonstrate to your lecturer that you observed (and understood) the most important features of the site and you acknowledge that these are some of the most important aspects of what 'you got out of' the visit.

If you have some previous work experience relating to the topic you might offer some professional advice. Perhaps picture yourself as a professional reviewing certain practices of the plant and providing some written feedback / comment to a manager outside the company.

As you can see, these aims generate far more specific outcomes than merely 'taking a trip' to the plant. In some respects, the visit is like a school excursion, but it is more an application of your formal education. Rather than sitting in a confined classroom and thinking about how a refinery works, it represents a chance to visit one and really experience how it works.

Sections of a Site Visit Report

Always read your lecturer/tutor's criteria for assessment as a guide to writing. Refer to any class notes, handouts, or grading information when you outline your draft.

The following explanations may help you gain a better sense of the purpose of various sections:

Title Page

The title page should include the **title of your visit**. The title of your project should not be overly long – shorter is usually better.

Include the name of the **site**, the **date**, and **your name**. Some lecturers also require other information such as your **student number** and/or **class**. Check with your lecturer.

Executive Summary

An executive summary outlines the main features of your report. It is an abridged version of the whole report, so keep the language simple and straightforward.

There are typical sections to an executive summary and this includes a few sentences on the **background** and **location**, a **rationale** for the report, a statement on **what was observed**, and a few sentences that offer **conclusions** and **recommendations** about the report.

Introduction

The introduction of the report should engage the reader. Rather than a dry and overly general description of the industry or company, it is better to set a context at the level of observation.

Start your report with a series of comments on the importance of what is being observed, a problem that resulted from not adhering to standards, or with an engineering problem or solution, for example.

Main Body of Report

This section usually involves explaining **procedures** and **processes**. Some of these might be chemical processes, construction, or commercial operations of the plant. Ensure that you check your assignment requirements.

Recommendations / Reflections

Most reports include a recommendation section. You might be required to reflect on your experience. If so, relate what you have observed with your professional experiences or wider reading and try and make connections there.

References

Refer to literature as directed by your lecturer. Some lecturers might require you to do reading in preparation for the assignment; in this case, you could refer to studies directly relating to the site of your visit.

If studies are limited, you might cast a wider net and explore similar issues found at your site with other companies or plants.