



Writing a great discussion

Why is the discussion so important?

When choosing what papers to read many researchers start with just the discussion and abstract. So, to increase the number of readers and citations and your paper's impact you need to make sure these sections are interesting, clear and understandable.

The discussion is where you can:

- explain what your results mean
- answer the “so what?” question
- highlight the contribution your paper makes to the field
- make a final good impression.

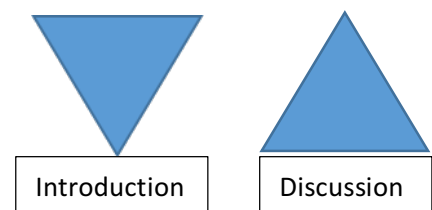
What should be included in the discussion?

In your discussion you should -

- answer your research question
- explain how the answer is supported by your results
- explain any unexpected results
- describe how your results are supported by other studies
- describe how your results differ to other studies
- explain any limitations to the study
- explain any alternative possible explanations for your results
- explain the meaning and importance of your findings
- state any applications, recommendations or implications based on your results.

What is the structure of the discussion?

The structure of the discussion is the opposite of the introduction. In the introduction you start with the larger picture and narrow down to your research question(s). In the discussion you start with the answer to your question(s) and build up to the larger picture.



What shouldn't be in the discussion?

To help the discussion be a strong section don't include:

- ✗ sentences copied from the introduction or abstract
- ✗ vague statements such as “we plan to carry out further work in this area”
- ✗ boastful and/or unrealistic claims such as “our findings will end malaria forever”
- ✗ details of your materials and methods
- ✗ too much speculation or guesswork
- ✗ attacks on other studies or researchers.

Useful phrases for the discussion

Our results show that ...	In this study, we have shown that...
Our first finding that ...	Our second finding that ...
Evidence of ...	Additional evidence comes from ...
Our demonstration that ...	Our findings demonstrate...
Previous studies have found ...	Contrary to previous studies, our results...
The results of our study not only ...but also...	
One limitation of our study is that...	Another limitation is that...
Our findings, when combined with evidence from other studies, support...	

More info

“The Discussion Section: Your Closing Argument” <http://www.clinchem.org/content/56/11/1671.full>

“How to Write Your First Research Paper” <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3178846/>

“The Writer's Handbook- Discussion Section” http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/SciRep_Disc.html

“How to Write an Effective Discussion” http://cancer.dartmouth.edu/documents/pdf/effective_discussions.pdf

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