

DISCUSSION

The Discussion section follows the Results and precedes the Conclusions and Recommendations section. It is here that the authors indicate the significance of their results. They answer the question, “Why did we get the results we did?” This section provides logical explanations for the results from the study. Those explanations are often reached by comparing and contrasting the results to prior studies’ findings, so citations to the studies discussed in the Literature Review generally reappear here. **This section also usually discusses the limitations of the study and speculates on what the results say about the problem(s) identified in the research question(s). This section is very important because it is finally moving towards an argument. Since the researchers interpret their results** according to theoretical underpinnings in this section, there is more room for difference of opinion. The way the authors interpret their results may be quite different from the way you would interpret them or the way another researcher would interpret them.

Note: Some articles collapse the Discussion and Conclusion sections together under a single heading (usually “Conclusion”).

How to Organize the Discussion Section

It’s not enough to use figures and tables in your results section to convince your readers about the importance of your findings. You need to support your results section by providing more explanation in the discussion section about what you found.

In the discussion section, based on your findings, you defend the answers to your research questions and create arguments to support your conclusions.

Below is a list of questions to guide you when organizing the structure of your discussion section ([Viera et al., 2018](#)):

- What experiments did you conduct and what were the results?
- What do the results mean?
- What were the important results from your study?
- How did the results answer your research questions?
- Did your results support your hypothesis or reject your hypothesis?
- What are the variables or factors that might affect your results?
- What were the strengths and limitations of your study?
- What other published works support your findings?
- What other published works contradict your findings?
- What possible factors might cause your findings different from other findings?
- What is the significance of your research?
- What are new research questions to explore based on your findings?

The structure of the discussion section may be different from one paper to another, but it commonly has a beginning, middle-, and end- to the section.

Present the contents of your section from narrow context (your study) to broader context (your field of study).

One way to organize the structure of the discussion section is by dividing it into three parts (Ghasemi, 2019):

- **The beginning:** The first sentence of the first paragraph should state the importance and the new findings of your research. The first paragraph may also include answers to your research questions mentioned in your introduction section.
- **The middle:** The middle should contain the interpretations of the results to defend your answers, the strength of the study, the limitations of the study, and an update literature review that validates your findings.
- **The end:** The end concludes the study and the significance of your research.

Another possible way to organize the discussion section was proposed by Michael Docherty in British Medical Journal: is by using this structure ([Docherty, 1999](#)):

- Discussion of important findings
- Comparison of your results with other published works
- Include the strengths and limitations of the study
- Conclusion and possible implications of your study, including the significance of your study – address why and how is it meaningful
- Future research questions based on your findings

Finally, a last option is structuring your discussion this way (Hofmann, 2013, pg. 104):

- **First Paragraph:** Provide an interpretation based on your key findings. Then support your interpretation with evidence.
- **Middle Paragraphs:** The middle paragraphs should include the following
 - Secondary results
 - Limitations
 - Unexpected findings
 - Comparisons to previous publications
- **Last Paragraph:** The last paragraph should provide a summarization (conclusion) along with detailing the significance, implications and potential next steps.

Remember, at the heart of the discussion section is presenting an interpretation of your major findings.

Tips to Write the Discussion Section

- Highlight the significance of your findings
- Mention how the study will fill a gap in knowledge.
- Indicate the implication of your research.
- Avoid generalizing, misinterpreting your results, drawing a conclusion with no supportive findings from your results.

The **discussion section** is where you delve into the meaning, importance, and relevance of your [results](#).

It should focus on explaining and evaluating what you found, showing how it relates to your [literature review](#) and paper or [dissertation topic](#), and making an argument in support of your overall conclusion. It should **not** be a second results section.

There are different ways to write this section, but you can focus your writing around these key elements:

- **[Summary](#)**: A brief recap of your key results
- **Interpretations**: What do your results mean?
- **Implications**: Why do your results matter?
- **Limitations**: What can't your results tell us?
- **Recommendations**: Avenues for further studies or analyses

Note: There is often overlap between your discussion and [conclusion section](#), but these are usually separate sections. However, in some cases, these two sections are combined.