

Good Writing Practice

Results section of a journal article



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Introduction

In the sequence of journal article writing, the Results section is third after Title (the shortest) and Methods (uncomplicated chronological order). This sequence is directed to graduate students familiar with a research project. To start, the sequence is focused on one set of data for which pertinent methods were written. As additional sets of data and their pertinent methods are written, the whole journal article will take shape guided by the following Results section-specific conceptual components:

1. Context re-orientation,
2. Data presentation, and
3. Result statement + data-based preliminary interpretation.

There are two further considerations when writing the Results section:

4. Tense, and
5. Premature inference.

1. Context re-orientation

Context re-orientation can be expressed minimally as a subheading and a sentence. Such re-orientation enables the Results section to be self-sufficient, minimising the necessity to reread the Introduction and Methods section.

Example

Relative Molecular Weight Determination
To determine the relative molecular weights of proteins A and B in order to ascertain their structural relation, the purified proteins were electrophoresed on polyacrylamide.

2. Data presentation

A table or figure is usually the focus of the Results section. Thus, excessive repetition of the data as data verbalisation is verbose and unsophisticated to an insightful reader, who would view the repetition as a ploy to increase (pad) article length.

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Example

The movement of protein A **corresponded** to a marker with a molecular weight twice that of protein B (Fig. 3).

3. Result statement plus data-based preliminary interpretation

Results are data-based observations, trends, comparisons.

As shown by electrophoresis (Fig. 3), the molecular weight of protein A **was** twice that of protein B, **an observation consistent with protein A as a dimer of protein B.**

4. Tense

Being a retrospective, the tense in a journal article is primarily past which conventionally conveys an observation of past information, not a current observation of the visual (graphical) data. Also, the past tense conveys understatement. *Something was* as opposed to the time-independent, over-stated truism *something is*.

5. Controversial inference of data-based preliminary interpretation

Placing preliminary interpretation statements in the Results section is controversial because of a resemblance to Discussion section components. However, the Discussion extends the Results into the following four types of paragraphs: conclusions-support, limitation – counterargument, recommended future research, and conclusion-consequence – all of which are based on already expressed result statements in the Results section. Not one of these conceptual paragraphs appears in the Results section.

Conclusion

Each component of the Results section should be oriented to the relevant Method description. Data presented in tables and figures conveys more information than descriptive text, which should be used for observations – not data repetition.