

Handout: Developing the Discussion section

1. First paragraph of the Discussion

What to do:

- ✓ Answer the question(s) posed by the objective(s) of your study
- ✓ Bring the results together in a way that generates a broader understanding
- ✓ Summarize the results in 'big picture' terms
- ✓ Announce the points that will be discussed in the following paragraphs

What to avoid:

- ✗ Repeating the results in great detail and using statistics from the Results section

Box 1: Bullet points of your first paragraph of the Discussion

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2. Middle paragraphs of the Discussion

What to do for each result in a separate paragraph:

- ✓ State each result and give the specific supporting evidence from your study without repeating the same words from the results section
- ✓ Compare and contrast with other relevant studies or other sources of information
- ✓ Discuss possible causes or consequences of the findings
- ✓ Interpret the findings on the basis of what it means in the context of the lives and health of people

What to avoid:

- ✗ Comparing the results with other studies that are not relevant
- ✗ Giving interpretations that go beyond the scope of your study's results

Box 2: Bullet points of your middle paragraph(s) of the Discussion

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3. Paragraph on the limitations of the study

What to do:

- ✓ State only the most serious limitations
- ✓ Explain the limitation, don't just label it
- ✓ Be as precise about the extent of the limitation as possible (confidence intervals, level of detection allowed by sample size, etc.)
- ✓ Interpret the data in light of the limitations

What to avoid:(See Error B6)

- ✗ Listing every possible limitation of your study
- ✗ Labeling your limitation without an explanation

Box 3: Bullet points of limitations

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4. Last paragraph of the Discussion

What to do:

- ✓ Summarize the conclusion points of the individual middle paragraphs of the discussion
- ✓ Bring all the points of conclusion together to point to the broader topic
- ✓ Propose practical recommendations on the basis of the conclusion points
- ✓ Add action points in terms of future studies

What to avoid:

- ✗ Repeating results again without adding a layer of interpretation
- ✗ Providing conclusions that are not fully supported by the results
- ✗ Proposing recommendations that are disconnected from the conclusions

Box 4: Bullet points of your last paragraph of the Discussion

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