**Handout: Tips on writing the Discussion**

**What should be in the Discussion section:**

1. Summary paragraph linking the overall findings to the objectives of the study.
2. Middle paragraphs – a paragraph for each result:
   - ✓ State each principal result:
     - Give sufficient evidence for each conclusion
     - Try not to use the same words as in the results section.
   - ✓ How your results relate to other published literature?
     - Do they agree, contradict, or are they the exceptions to the rule?
     - Use references
   - ✓ Explain what could be some possible causes for these results.
     - What implications do the findings have for the target population or for public health?
3. Limitations of the study.
   - ✓ Explain the limitations of the study.
   - ✓ Interpret the data in the light of this limitation.
4. Conclusions of the study.
   - ✓ What conclusions can you draw?
   - ✓ Give the big picture: do your findings help us understand a broader topic?
5. Recommendations related to unanswered questions and future research.
   - ✓ Suggest practical applications of your results.
   - ✓ What are policy implications of these findings?
   - ✓ What specific research question should next be pursued?

**Tips**
- Give sufficient evidence for each result.
- Discuss possible reasons for expected and unexpected findings.
- Limit the number of limitations, but fully explain them.

**What to Avoid**
- Do not compare or contrast your results with other research studies that are not relevant, e.g., similar in study population, study site, and/or methodology.
- Do not over-generalize.
- Do not ignore or bury major issues or deviations in your data.
- Do not speculate about issues that your data does not focus on.

**Refer to 'A Guide to Quantitative Scientific Writing' for common errors related to the Methods section:**

A2     Not referencing statements

A8     Characterizing an observation as 'the first'

A9     Errors in reasoning

B5     Listing interpretations, but not defending one

B6     Not fully explaining limitations

B7     Writing generic recommendations

B8     Presenting new data

B11    Naïve theories of change