

Writing a Results Section

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The next stage of any research paper: writing the results section, announcing your findings to the world.

In theory, this is the easiest part to write, because it is a straightforward commentary of exactly what you observed and found. In reality, it can be a little tricky, because it is very easy to include too much information and bury the important findings.



The banner features the Explorable logo and the text "Quiz Time!" in a white, handwritten-style font. Below the text are three quiz cards, each with a different image and title:

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Writing a Results Section

Too Much Information?

The results section is not for interpreting the results in any way; that belongs strictly in the discussion section. You should aim to narrate your findings without trying to interpret or evaluate them, other than to provide a link to the discussion section.

For example, you may have noticed an unusual correlation between two variables during the analysis of your results. It is correct to point this out in the results section.

Speculating why this correlation is happening, and postulating about what may be happening, belongs in the discussion section [1].

It is very easy to put too much information into the results section and obscure your findings underneath reams of irrelevance.

If you make a table [2] of your findings, you do not need to insert a graph highlighting the same data. If you have a table of results, refer to it in the text, but do not repeat the figures [3] - duplicate information will be penalized.

One common way of getting around this is to be less specific in the text. For example, if the result in table one shows 23.9%, you could write....

Table One shows that almost a quarter of.....

Tips for Writing a Results Section

Perhaps the best way to use the results section is to show the most relevant information in the graphs, figures and tables.

The text, conversely, is used to direct the reader to those, also clarifying any unclear points. The text should also act as a link to the discussion section, highlighting any correlations and findings and leaving plenty of open questions.

For most research paper formats [4], there are two ways of presenting and organizing the results. The first method is to present the results and add a short discussion explaining them at the end, before leading into the discussion proper.

This is very common where the research paper is straightforward, and provides continuity. The other way is to present a section and then discuss it, before presenting the next section with a short discussion. This is common in longer papers, and your discussion part of the paper will generally follow the same structure.

Be sure to include negative results - writing a results section without them not only invalidate the paper, but it is extremely bad science. The negative results, and how you handle them, often gives you the makings of a great discussion section, so do not be afraid to highlight them.

Using an Appendix to Streamline Writing the Results Section

If you condense your raw data down, there is no need to include the initial findings in the results, because this will simply confuse the reader.

If you are in doubt about how much to include, you can always insert your raw data into the appendix section, allowing others to follow your calculations from the start. This is especially useful if you have used many statistical manipulations, so that people can check your calculations and ensure that you have not made any mistakes.

In the age of spreadsheets, where the computer program prepares all of the calculations for

you, this is becoming less common, although you should specify the program that you used and the version. On that note, it is unnecessary show your working - assume that the reader understands what a Chi Squared test, or a Students t-test ^[5] is, and can perform it themselves.

Once you have a streamlined and informative results section, you can move onto the discussion section, where you begin to elaborate your findings.

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Links

[1] <https://staging.explorable.com/writing-a-discussion-section>

[2] <https://staging.explorable.com/how-to-format-a-table>

[3] <https://staging.explorable.com/floating-blocks>

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