

Part V: Writing your “Discussion” Section

This is the section of your paper where you get to express what you think your results mean. What you infer from your data may be different from what your research partner infers.

Important points to remember as you write this section:

1. Keep a scientific tone but use active voice whenever possible.
2. Use of the first person is okay, but too much use of the first person may actually distract the reader from the main points.
3. Move from specific to general. Describe the correlations you found, and relate those to your hypothesis. Was your hypothesis supported or rejected? Explain why or why not.
4. Compare your results to what you discussed in your literature review section. How do your results relate to the bigger picture? (Be sure no new results are introduced here; that belongs in the results section. However, do not waste entire sentences restating your results. Use bridge sentences to relate the result to the interpretation, such as, “The slow response of the lead-exposed neurons relative to controls suggests that [interpretation].”)
5. Discuss your methodology, and identify weaknesses and/or gaps.
6. Discuss your conclusions and suggest any future work you think needs to be done.

A good outline for this section:

- I. Statistical analysis—was your hypothesis supported or rejected? Explain.
- II. Discussion of your methodological weaknesses and strengths
- III. Comparison of results to what you discussed in the literature review
- IV. Bigger picture
- V. Your conclusion and suggestion for future work

Grading the Discussion Section (obtained from the “Final Paper Rubric”)

1. *States the conclusion (hypothesis supported?/problem solved?); explains results and related statistics without merely repeating results section of the paper.*
2. *Relates findings to others' ideas discussed in literature review*
3. *Evaluates methodology; identifies weaknesses and/or gaps in the process*
4. *Suggests a plan for future experimental steps to refine and answers questions raised in original experiment*