

Handout: Writing up the results

Guiding principles about what should be in the text versus tables and figures:

- The tables and the text should stand independently while being connected to each other.
- The reader should be able to understand most of the results through browsing the tables and figures.
- Similarly, it should be possible to get the key points of the results by only reading through the text.

Tips for text

- Report main result(s) supported by selected data to explain what you found in simple terms.
- Examine each of your tables or figures. From these, write text that describes the principal pattern and or important features without repeating all the data from the table or figure.
- Organize the data in either chronological order according to the Methods, or in order of most to least important, or from simple to complex.
- Use past tense to describe what happened.
- Link the text you write to a specific table or figure. For example, 'The majority (93%) of cases were women (Table 1).

Tips for tables and figures

- Most journals limit the number of tables or figures to a maximum of five. Exceptionally complex studies may have a larger number, but aiming for a shorter number of tables and figures is better.
- Number tables and figures consecutively in the same sequence they are first mentioned in the text.
- Depending on the journal, they should be in order at the end of the paper, after the references, or located appropriately within the text of your results section.
- Provide a heading for each table and figure. Table headings should be above the table and figure headings should be below the figure.

What to Avoid

- Writing out every result in a table. The results to be pointed in the text are those that contribute to each specific objective.
- Do not repeat or further explain methods.
- Do not discuss or interpret results.
- Do not use references in the results section of the manuscript.

Refer to 'A Guide to Quantitative Scientific Writing in the Health Sciences' for common errors related to the Results section:

F. Recording scientific data

- F1 Using statistics in place of the study question to frame results
 - F1a Framing narrative results around p-values
- F2 Not presenting the core data
- F3 Using too many decimal places
- F4 Using too few decimal places
- F5 Using incomplete headings for tables and figures
- F6 Imbalance between table and narrative presentation of the results
- F7 Pointing too explicitly to tables and figures
- F8 Using inappropriate figures
- F9 Using the wrong symbol to designate degree
- F10 Using non-standard footnote symbols in tables
- F11 Comparing to a varying baseline
- F12 Generic data tables that lack a clear message
- F13 Table layout that impairs comparisons
- F14 Maps with irrelevant details
- F15 Numbering figures or tables out of sequence