**Dissertation/Thesis Discussion Template**

Thanks for downloading the template. **Here’s what you need to know:**

This document provides a generic template for the discussion chapter/section in a typical dissertation, thesis, or research project. While the **exact requirements will vary between universities** and degree programs, this template should help you get started with the generic essentials.

Keep in mind that some universities will encourage or require students to combine the discussion and conclusion chapters. Similarly, for some projects, it may make more sense to combine the results and discussion chapters (especially for qualitative studies). So, be sure to follow any instructions or guidance provided by your university to ensure you’re aligned with their specific requirements.

In each section, we’ll briefly **explain what that section is all about** and the essential things that you **need to achieve there**. We’ll also provide links to additional videos and blog posts that will help you conquer each section with confidence.

If you’re new to research, a good starting point would be to watch our YouTube video covering the discussion chapter: <https://gradcoach.com/discussion-chapter-examples/>

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If you need **1-on-1 assistance** with your dissertation or thesis, feel free to [book an initial consultation](https://my.gradcoach.com/book/new/) with us to discuss private coaching for your project.

Good luck with your research!

***Grad Coach***

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# Opening/Intro Section

In the first section of your discussion chapter, you should remind the reader of the golden thread underpinning your dissertation or thesis. If you’re not familiar with the golden thread, you can [watch this video](https://gradcoach.com/research-aims-objectives-questions/).

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In this section, you’ll should aim to write a concise paragraph that includes the following:

* A sentence repeating your specific research problem
* A sentence or two repeating your research aims, objectives, and questions
* If you have hypotheses, you can also briefly mention these.
* A sentence or two reminding the reader of the methodology you used in your study
* A sentence indicating the purpose of this chapter
* A sentence outlining the layout of the chapter

Keep in mind that this is purely an opening section, so don’t get too detailed. Keep it short.

# Overview of Key Findings

In this section, you’ll need to present a summary of the key findings from your study in one or two concise yet cohesive paragraphs. The key findings are those that directly relate to your original research questions (and your golden thread in general).

This section may look different for qualitative and quantitative research projects. For example, qualitative research may report on themes and concepts, whereas quantitative research may touch on correlations and causal relationships.

Regardless of the methodology, your goal here is to highlight the overall key findings in relation to your research questions. For example, if your research questions asked what the antecedents of a certain outcome were, you’d need to outline the relevant antecedents in this section. Some examples of the kind of language you’d use here include:

* The data suggest that…
* The data support/oppose the theory that…
* The analysis identifies…

Importantly, this section is only an overview, not an in-depth discussion. You’ll get into that in the next section. So, keep it concise here and lay a foundation for the next section.

# Interpretation of Findings

This section will typically be the longest one in the chapter, as this is where you’ll spend time unpacking and interpreting your findings and explaining what they mean within your context. In your previous chapter (the results chapter), you purely described the data, whereas in this chapter you will explain what it means in relation to the golden thread.

**An important note** – everything you discuss in this chapter needs to be rooted in data that you presented in your previous chapter (i.e., the results chapter). So, make sure that you only include in this chapter what you reported in your results chapter – don’t introduce new information. If you need to, you can always go back and expand upon your results chapter so that there is a strong foundation for the discussion chapter.

At its core, the goal of this section is to assess how your findings compare to those of the existing research (i.e., the studies cited in your literature review chapter). By doing this, you’ll communicate what the data means in your context, and you’ll position it in relation to existing studies (i.e., does it align or misalign with existing research?).

Keep in mind that even if your findings contrast with the existing research, you still need to include these in your discussion. In fact, findings that contrast with the existing literature are often the most interesting and noteworthy, so don’t shy away from these. They can be fantastic mark earners.

Below are a few questions to help guide your discussion in this section:

* How do your findings relate with those of previous studies?
* If your findings differ from those of previous studies, why may this be the case?
* What do your findings contribute to your field of research?
* What other explanations could there be for your findings?

When interpreting your findings, be careful not to draw conclusions that aren’t substantiated by the data (in the results chapter). Every claim you make needs to be backed up with evidence or findings from the data. Of course, data can be interpreted in many ways, so be careful not to be overly zealous in your claims, but at the same time, don’t shy away from interpreting meaning.

In terms of the structure of this section, this will partly depend on whether your research methodology was quantitative, qualitative or mixed, but there are still a few common options.

* One way is to structure this section similarly to how you structured the results chapter. This could be by research question, variables or groups of variables.
* Another option is to structure it according to a specific theoretical framework, if you have one.

Ultimately, you should aim to have a strong alignment between the results and discussion chapters, so that the reader can bounce between the two fairly easily, should they want to revisit the supporting data. So, it often makes sense to mimic the preceding chapter’s structure to a certain degree.

# Closing Summary

In this section, you’ll want to provide a brief summary of the key findings – in other words, the findings that directly address your research questions. This will be very similar to the “overview of key findings” section we covered earlier, but a bit more concise, as you’re just recapping on what was already presented.

When writing this concluding summary, keep in mind that some readers may skip straight to this section from the beginning of the chapter. So, make sure that this section flows well from and has a strong connection to the opening section of the chapter.

# Additional (free) resources

We hope you found this template useful. Here are a few more resources you might find useful while working on your discussion chapter:

* [How to write the discussion chapter](https://gradcoach.com/discussion-chapter-examples/) (video & article)
* [Common mistakes to avoid in the discussion chapter](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UjINrrq_ts) (video)
* [Free templates for each section of the dissertation/thesis](https://gradcoach.com/category/templates-tools/)
* [Free dissertation writing course (online)](https://gradcoach.com/dissertation-course/)

If you would like **1-on-1 support** with your dissertation, thesis or research project, check out our [private coaching service here](https://gradcoach.com/dissertation-coaching/).