

Report

Once a project's data has been collected and analysed, there are two remaining major steps in the research process: the first is to produce an account – often called a report - of the research. This report must accurately describe both the process followed by the researchers and the project's key findings. The second is to disseminate that report to whomever the researchers believe should read it!

In your role as a research assistant, you may be asked to support your supervisor as he/she writes a report and disseminates it. This module will prepare you for those tasks.

The most important components of research reports

First of all, research reports must explicitly describe the research methods used to collect the data. This section must contain, among other things, the type of methods used, the time the project took place, the place in which the data was collected, and the method by which the participants were recruited. All decisions should be justified so that readers can judge their appropriateness given the available resources and time. The ethical standards that the project was obliged to meet – and the way in which they were met - must be clearly described. Many researchers also include a sub-section in their research methods outlining the inherent limitations in their methodology (for example, is it possible that survey respondents might have lied?).

It is a mistake to assume that once data has been analysed, a report will simply “write itself.” For one thing, it is not enough to simply show what the data say.

In addition to outlining each step taken during the project, researchers must make it clear how they got from the data to the findings. In quantitative research, a report should include an explanation of statistical techniques and data manipulation used in the project. In qualitative research, reports should include explicit descriptions of the analytic procedures. Researchers should acknowledge that readers are critical and will not simply accept findings without knowing how they were generated: in other words, the work's credibility.

Take a look at this excerpt from the final project report by Humber research Mary Elliott and Sandra Filice. Note that the researchers clearly outline the ways in which they analysed the data.

"This study was conducted using a quasi-experimental design including a retrospective review of student's academic record using logistical regression analysis and an analysis of discriminatory functions including:

- High school or postsecondary institution of origin
- Grades at prior institutions of learning
- Clinical practicum performance issues
- Outcomes of academic misconduct findings.

In addition individual personal interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data regarding the factors affecting each graduate's outcome on the Canadian Registered Nurse Examination."