

Twelve Steps to Writing an Effective Results Section

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The purpose of a Results section is to present the *key* results of your research without interpreting their meaning. It cannot be combined with the Discussion section unless the journal combines the Results and Discussion into one section. The results should be presented in an orderly sequence, using an outline as a guide for writing and following the sequence of the Methods section upon which the results are based. For every result there must be a method in the Methods section. It is important to carefully plan the tables and figures to ensure that their sequencing tells a story. If you need help in preparing an outline see our article *Eight Steps to Developing an Effective Manuscript Outline* at <http://www.sfedit.net/newsletters.htm>.

1. Determine which results to present by deciding which are relevant to the question(s) presented in the Introduction irrespective of whether or not the results support the hypothesis(es). The Results section does not need to include every result you obtained or observed.
2. Organize the data in the Results section in either chronological order according to the Methods or in order of most to least important. Within each paragraph, the order of most to least important results should be followed.
3. Determine whether the data are best presented in the form of text, figures, graphs, or tables.
4. Summarize your findings and point the reader to the relevant data in the text, figures and/or tables. The text should complement the figures or tables, not repeat the same information.
5. Describe the results and data of the controls and include observations not presented in a formal figure or table, if appropriate.
6. Provide a clear description of the magnitude of a response or difference. If appropriate, use percentage of change rather than exact data.
7. Make sure that the data are accurate and consistent throughout the manuscript.
8. Summarize the statistical analysis and report actual P values for all primary analyses.

9. Use the past tense when you refer to your results.
10. Number figures and tables 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 report after the References, or located appropriately within the text of your results section.
11. Provide a heading for each figure and table. Depending on the journal the table titles and figure legends should be listed separately or located above the table or below the figure. Each figure and table must be sufficiently complete that it could stand on its own, separate from the text.
12. Write with accuracy, brevity and clarity.