Tips for Writing a Good Report

Title

Should be clear and descriptive, but not too long. Ideally should state main result.

Introduction

In about 3-5 paragraphs, an introduction:

1) introduces the problem and describes why it is interesting;

2) summarizes what’s known about the problem, citing prior work; and

3) summarizes your approach.

• Ask yourself: Why is this problem important? Why is it timely? How does your approach to the

problem differ from other approaches?

• You may provide a brief preview of your results at the end of the introduction - but no more

than a preview.

• Do not use subheadings in the introduction.

Methods

• Explain your methods in enough detail for a researcher in the same field to replicate the

experiments and for a researcher in a related field to understand the essence of the methods.

• Do not include results (or discussion) in methods, only methods. However, you can briefly

indicate the rationale for a procedure if it makes the methods more readable.

• Use bold subheadings (on separate lines) to break up the methods. This organizes the methods

section by topic and allows readers interested only in some aspects of the methods to quickly

find what they are looking for.

• Each subheading should be followed by one or a few paragraphs. Each paragraph should have a

topic sentence and should be written clearly and concisely.

• Avoid repetition. Use “see above” when appropriate and cite published methods when

appropriate.

Results

• Organize your results in a logically coherent order. The order does NOT have to be the order in

which the experiments were done, but rather the one which makes the most coherent “story”. It

is not necessary to describe every experiment that was done during the summer. Focus on your

best experiments. You can mention experiments that did not work briefly and comment on why

they may not have worked.

• Figures should be numbered in the order they are cited in the text. Insert figures into the

document near where they are discussed.

• Each figure or table MUST have a legend.

Discussion

• Discuss your results, putting them in the context of what was known before your study.

• Highlight any agreements or disagreements between your data and those of other published

studies. Comment on possible reasons for disagreements.

• Discuss open questions raised by your findings and any general lessons or conclusions that can

be drawn.

References

• Cite relevant references for statements of known results, hypotheses, methods, or background

information. Cite them in the text like this:

“In response to death stimuli, ubiquitination of DIAP1 is enhanced by interaction with Reaper

(Martin, 2002; Palaga & Osborne, 2002).”

• For references with one author, cite as (Smith, 20XX), where 20XX is the year of publication.

For references with two authors, cite as (Smith & Jones, 20XX), and for references with three or

more authors, cite as Smith et al., 20XX (Latin for “and others”). Include an alphabetical list at

the end (ordered by last name of first author), in this format:

Martin, S. J. (2002). Destabilizing influences in apoptosis: sowing the seeds of IAP destruction. Cell

109, 793-796.

Palaga, T. and Osborne, B. (2002). The 3D’s of apoptosis: death, degradation and DIAPs. Nature

Cell Biol. 4, E149-E151.

• Note that the journal name is italicized and the volume number is in bold. In the reference list,

include all authors, even if there are more than two. Make sure that all references cited in the

text appear in the reference list at the end and vice versa.

Final Comment

Remember, this is a research report, not a grant proposal or grant progress report. Specific aims are

not relevant and should not be mentioned, although of course you will discuss the overall goal of

your study in the introduction.