

A final stylistic point: Unlike other sections of the report, the Introduction section does not usually come with a heading saying that it is the Introduction. It is just the first section of the report (repeat the report's title at the top of the page if you are starting a fresh page with your Introduction).

## ***Method***

The Method section sets out how you went about conducting your study in the clearest possible terms. The standard rule is that it should contain enough information for an interested researcher to precisely replicate what you did, but you need to use discretion in applying this advice. You don't need to detail every tiny aspect of the research (the line-spacing on your questionnaire, the size of the room, the colour of the tie you were wearing) unless you have reason to believe that these might impact on the results. Assume that your readers already have some basic psychological knowledge and adequate research skills, allowing them to fill in missing details. Only if your study required specialized (e.g, purpose-built) equipment, do you need to go into extensive descriptions, and in this case, it may be better to present this additional information in an Appendix (see below) rather than the Method section itself.

Often, the Method section is broken down into subsections as follows:

- Design:* This subsection includes information about how the study was designed such as: how participants were allocated to different conditions, whether it was a between-subjects or within-subjects design, what the independent and dependent variables were, and so on.
- Participants:* In this subsection, you provide details of who your participants were (how many males and females, age-range if relevant, occupation etc) and how many took part.
- Materials:* Here you present information about the equipment (if any) used in your study. If you used only questionnaires but there were a number of these, you may decide to describe these under the heading of Measures instead. If there was no equipment, or if the questionnaire was a straightforward one, you do not need to include this subsection at all. (Only include a Materials or Measures subsection if it allows clearer presentation of the required information). It is not usually necessary to list every item of any questionnaire you used: Just give examples and include a full copy in an Appendix (see below).
- Task:* In studies where there is a complicated experimental task for participants to perform, clarity may be aided by including a section describing it. When the task does not require separate explanation (e.g., simple presentation of stimuli, completion of questionnaires etc), just include the description of the task under the heading of Procedure.

*Procedure:* Usually the longest subsection of the Method. Here you take the reader through what happened in the study, step-by-step, telling the story of how the study was conducted as clearly as possible.

Remember that not all of these subsections are necessary or relevant to all kinds of study (e.g., there may be no apparatus to speak of), so don't feel obliged to include them if they don't make sense in the context of your report. Some Method sections for simple experiments are not broken down into subsections at all, but when the study is a very complex one, you might need additional subsections (e.g., an overview orienting readers to the content of the rest of the Method). Use as many or as few subsections as you need to convey the necessary information to the reader with clarity.

## ***Results***

This section presents what you found in your study, which usually involves presenting the results of any statistical analyses you conducted. Students often think that the Results section is the easiest to prepare, and that pretty much all they need to do is to paste together the output from SPSS. Unfortunately, this is quite wrong. Although it presents entirely factual information, the reader must be led through this information in a way that gives it maximal clarity and impact. You are not just listing statistics or other results in this section, but putting them into the context of the wider narrative of the report. This requires you to make decisions about the most logical sequence of information, the clearest way of presenting your data (descriptions, tables, or figures), which aspects deserve most emphasis, and which you can do without altogether with little damage to your central conclusions. It also means that you must use proper sentences organized to tell a coherent story, not just notes or sequences of numbers, tables, and figures.

Use Figures (the correct APA-style terminology for graphs or diagrams) and Tables if these make the findings clearer, but remember that sometimes a simple description will work better. However you must never use Tables or Figures to do the work of presenting the results on their own. Each Table and Figure should be given an informative title (e.g., Figure 1: Male and female decoding accuracy for anger and fear), and readers must be guided through the meaning of the information it presents in the main body of text ("Figure 1 shows that females obtained higher decoding accuracy scores for both emotions tested, but that this difference was greater for anger, than for fear).

Remember that your aim in the Results section (as in the Method) is clarity. You are trying to tell readers what they need to know to make sense of what you found. So although the content is entirely factual, it is very important that the facts are presented in such a way that they can be understood by someone who doesn't already know what happened. Also, don't get bogged down in detail. Data can be over-analyzed, and there is a skill in knowing what is worth reporting and what is not (just because you have done an additional analysis doesn't mean that it has produced anything worth mentioning). Similarly, don't feel the need to report in full all results of every statistical analysis that does need to be included. For example, if you conducted a series of relevant t-tests or ANOVAs, none of which produced significant results, just say so ("t-tests were also conducted to test the effects of gender, occupation, and age, but none of these yielded significant results").

The standard way of presenting statistical results is as follows:

✓ *Statistic* (degrees of freedom) = Number to two decimal places,  $p$  = exact probability to three decimal places, effect size.

For example,  $t(9) = 2.40$ ,  $p = .040$ ,  $d = .67$  (this means that you conducted a t-test with 9 degrees of freedom obtaining a t-value of 2.40 which was associated with a probability of .04 and therefore significant at the .05 level, and that the difference between conditions was two-thirds of a standard deviation unit). If your SPSS output gives the p-value as .000, note that this does not mean that the probability was zero, but that it was too small to register in three decimal places, ie.  $p < .001$ , so present it as such.

Remember that the results of statistical tests which assess differences (e.g., t-tests, ANOVAs) do not tell the reader anything about the direction of these differences (i.e., which condition has the higher mean value), so you will always need to supplement their presentation (if significant) with information about the mean values of the variables in the relevant conditions. If there are just two mean values to present, then a simple sentence will suffice for this purpose (a Figure or Table is unnecessary). However, if you are presenting four or more means to clarify a significant interaction effect (e.g., from an ANOVA), a Figure (probably a line graph) or a Table will usually be clearer.

Although you may be tempted to describe results associated with very low probabilities (e.g.,  $p < .001$ ) as highly significant, this should be avoided (an effect is either statistically significant or not). However, if you want to point out that a result almost reached the statistical criterion (e.g.,  $p < .06$ ), you may refer to it as near-significant (to be used sparingly!).

A final point is that you should try to avoid putting any interpretation on your Results, over and above what the statistics directly tell you. Describing results is what you are supposed to be doing here; explanation is reserved for the Discussion.