**How to Write a Discussion Section | Tips & Examples**

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The **discussion section** is where you delve into the meaning, importance, and relevance of your [results](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/results/).

It should focus on explaining and evaluating what you found, showing how it relates to your [literature review](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/literature-review/) and paper or [dissertation topic](https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/dissertation-topic/), and making an argument in support of your overall conclusion. It should **not** be a second results section.

There are different ways to write this section, but you can focus your writing around these key elements:

* [**Summary**](https://www.scribbr.com/working-with-sources/how-to-summarize/)**:** A brief recap of your key results
* **Interpretations:** What do your results mean?
* **Implications:** Why do your results matter?
* **Limitations:** What can’t your results tell us?
* **Recommendations:** Avenues for further studies or analyses

NoteThere is often overlap between your discussion and [conclusion section](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/write-conclusion/), but these are usually separate sections. However, in some cases, these two sections are combined.

If you’re unsure about your field’s best practices, check out [sample dissertations](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/thesis-databases/) in your field or your departmental guidelines.

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**What not to include in your discussion section**

There are a few common mistakes to avoid when writing the discussion section of your paper.

* **Don’t introduce new results:** You should only discuss the data that you have already reported in your [results section](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/results/).
* **Don’t make inflated claims:** Avoid overinterpretation and speculation that isn’t directly supported by your data.
* **Don’t undermine your research:** The discussion of limitations should aim to strengthen your credibility, not emphasize weaknesses or failures.

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**Step 1: Summarize your key findings**

Start this section by reiterating your [research problem](https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/research-problem/) and concisely summarizing your major findings. To speed up the process you can use a [summarizer](https://www.scribbr.com/text-summarizer/) to quickly get an overview of all important findings. Don’t just repeat all the data you have already reported—aim for a clear statement of the overall result that directly answers your main [research question](https://www.scribbr.com/?p=22914). This should be no more than one paragraph.

Many students struggle with the differences between a discussion section and a [results section](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/results/). The crux of the matter is that your results sections should present your results, and your discussion section should subjectively evaluate them. Try not to blend elements of these two sections, in order to keep your paper sharp.

Examples: Summarization sentence starters

* The results indicate that…
* The study demonstrates a correlation between…
* This analysis supports the theory that…
* The data suggest that…

**Step 2: Give your interpretations**

The meaning of your results may seem obvious to you, but it’s important to spell out their significance for your reader, showing exactly how they answer your research question.

The form of your interpretations will depend on the type of research, but some typical approaches to interpreting the data include:

* Identifying [correlations](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/correlational-research/), patterns, and relationships among the data
* Discussing whether the results met your expectations or supported your [hypotheses](https://www.scribbr.nl/methodology/hypotheses/)
* Contextualizing your findings within previous research and theory
* Explaining unexpected results and evaluating their significance
* Considering possible alternative explanations and making an argument for your position

You can organize your discussion around key themes, hypotheses, or research questions, following the same structure as your results section. Alternatively, you can also begin by highlighting the most significant or unexpected results.

Examples: Interpretation sentence starters

* In line with the hypothesis…
* Contrary to the hypothesized association…
* The results contradict the claims of Smith (2022) that…
* The results might suggest that *x*. However, based on the findings of similar studies, a more plausible explanation is *y*.

**Step 3: Discuss the implications**

As well as giving your own interpretations, make sure to relate your results back to the scholarly work that you surveyed in the [literature review](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/literature-review/). The discussion should show how your findings fit with existing knowledge, what new insights they contribute, and what consequences they have for theory or practice.

Ask yourself these questions:

* Do your results support or challenge existing theories? If they support existing theories, what new information do they contribute? If they challenge existing theories, why do you think that is?
* Are there any practical implications?

Your overall aim is to show the reader exactly what your research has contributed, and why they should care.

Examples: Implication sentence starters

* These results build on existing evidence of…
* The results do not fit with the theory that…
* The experiment provides a new insight into the relationship between…
* These results should be taken into account when considering how to…
* The data contribute a clearer understanding of…
* While previous research has focused on *x*, these results demonstrate that *y*.

**Step 4: Acknowledge the limitations**

Even the best research has its limitations. Acknowledging these is important to demonstrate your credibility. Limitations aren’t about listing your errors, but about providing an accurate picture of what can and cannot be concluded from your study.

Limitations might be due to your overall research design, specific [methodological choices](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/methodology/), or unanticipated obstacles that emerged during your research process.

NoteYou should only mention limitations that are directly relevant to your [research objectives](https://www.scribbr.com/?p=24222). Then, share how much impact they had on achieving the aims of your research.

Here are a few common possibilities:

* If your sample size was small or limited to a specific group of people, explain how [generalizability](https://www.scribbr.com/research-bias/generalizability/) is limited.
* If you encountered problems when gathering or analyzing data, explain how these influenced the results.
* If there are potential [confounding variables](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/confounding-variables/) that you were unable to control, acknowledge the effect these may have had.

After noting the limitations, you can reiterate why the results are nonetheless [valid](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/reliability-vs-validity/) for the purpose of answering your research question.

Examples: Limitation sentence starters

* The generalizability of the results is limited by…
* The [reliability](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/reliability-vs-validity/) of these data is impacted by…
* Due to the lack of data on *x*, the results cannot confirm…
* The methodological choices were constrained by…
* It is beyond the [scope](https://www.scribbr.com/frequently-asked-questions/scope-of-research/) of this study to…

**Step 5: Share your recommendations**

Based on the discussion of your results, you can make recommendations for practical implementation or further research. Sometimes, the recommendations are saved for the [conclusion](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/write-conclusion/).

Suggestions for further research can lead directly from the limitations. Don’t just state that more studies should be done—give concrete ideas for how future work can build on areas that your own research was unable to address.

Examples: Recommendation sentence starters

* Further research is needed to establish…
* Future studies should take into account…
* Avenues for future research include…

**Discussion section example**

Here is an example of how you can introduce your discussion section. Note that it includes everything mentioned above: notably research outcomes, limitations, interpretations, and avenues for future research.

For this project, I am asking you to write a combined Results and Discussion section. The contents shall include but are not limited to the following items:

**Results/Findings:**

* The relationships between X and Y.
* The significance of differences among X and Y.
* The temporal and spatial changes of variables X and Y

**Discussions:**

* A discussion of the reasons for your findings – this is the place where you can go back to literature and find past work that may support your arguments.
* A discussion of the implementation of your project: discuss the pros and cons of current data visualization.