

Reporting Research

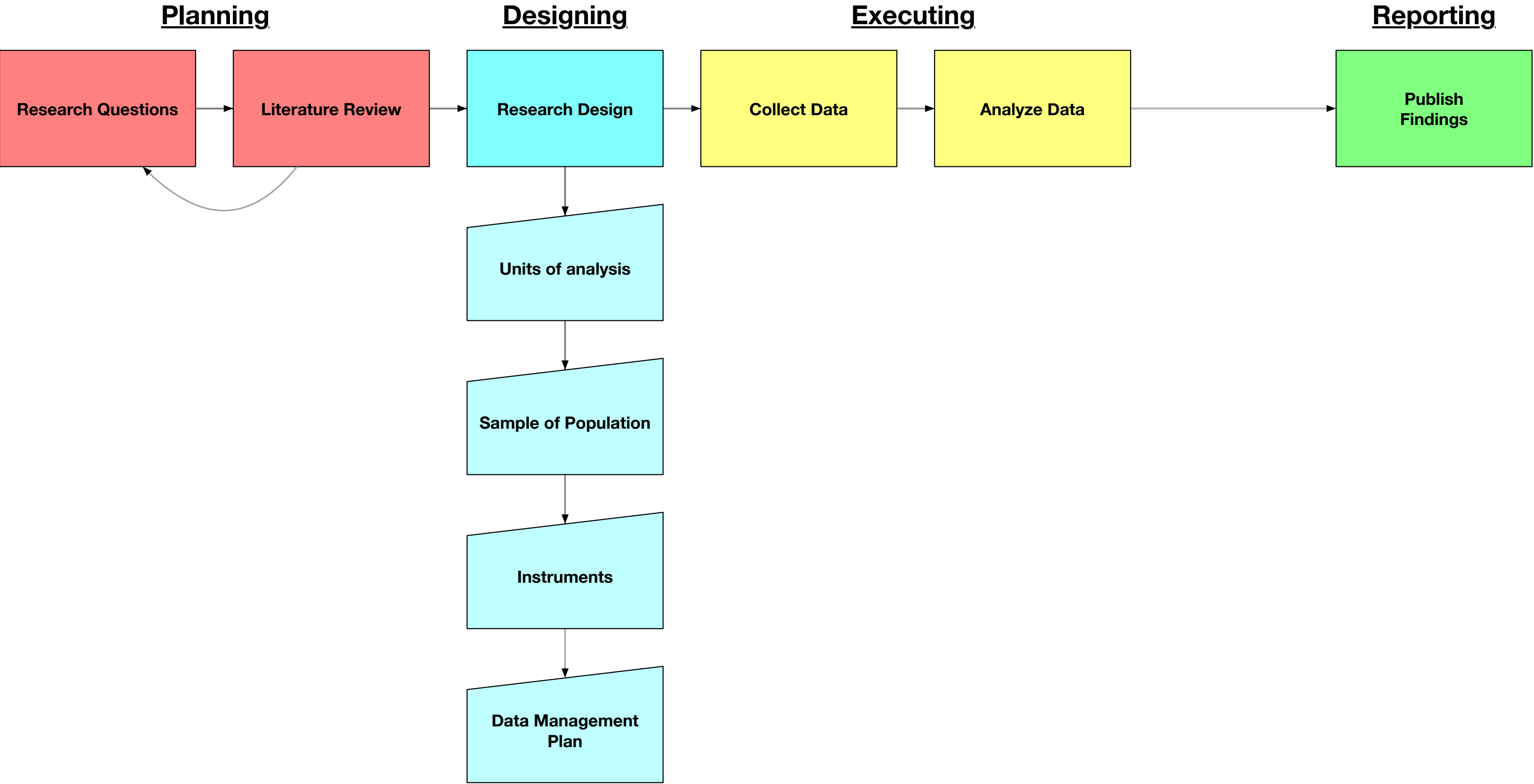
How to write about your findings

LIS 570

Agenda

How to write about your findings

- Overview of reporting and research-based writing
- My 8 tips for how to write about research (and not put your reader to sleep)



	<u>Positivism</u>	<u>Constructivism</u>	<u>Design</u>
Structure	Prescribed	Adaptable	Adaptable
Expectation for Results	Significance	Verifiable & Convincing	Verifiable & Convincing
Findings	Results first, discussion second	No results - argument	Design cycle
Venues	Conferences and journals	Journals	Conferences

Tip 1 - Write from an Outline

- Every piece of research / evaluation writing has an expected form
- Follow the form - if you are surprised your readers will be too!
 - Evaluation writing —> Executive Summary, Explanation of research, Methods, Findings, Discussion
 - Research writing (peer-review) —> Abstract, Introduction / Background, Previous findings (lit review), Methods, Findings, Discussion, Future work / Conclusion
- My super successful form for writing up your research:
 - https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jvU2BL4IstzAGxDh_GSX7_jARAmPEnGzwuPOYtUpxrQ/edit#gid=0

Tip 2 - The Abstract is a readers outline

- Condensed version of your research - but it should also present an argument
- Two types of arguments that work well for abstracts
 - **They say vs we say:** Previous research has argued that **X**, but here we demonstrate that **Y** is equally important. We do so by...
 - **What's new here:** A longstanding challenge in our field is X, but recent events complicate and require renewed attention to X. In this article we...

Tip 3 - Signpost your argument the rest of the paper

- Research writing isn't a magic show (reveal at the end) or a crime novel (whodunnit?)
- Provide a set of signposts in each section of your report:
 - End of section 1: "First we will review the literature, and then we will present findings from our research..."
 - End of section 2: "Next, we will present findings and then provide contextual discussion"
 - End of section 3: "In the concluding section of the paper we offer directions for future research..."
- Always be one step ahead of your reader - telling them what will come next
- This can also transform your writing into a "speech act" - or, "saying it makes it so"

Tip 4 - Passive Voice for Passive Research

- Consider two sentences:
 - A set of data was retrieved through a query interface by the researchers.
 - We assembled a dataset using the Facebook query interface.
- Consider the next two sentences:
 - 14 participants cried after or during an interview conducted by researchers.
 - Research interviews were often highly emotional for participants. In 14 of our interviews the participants showed such strong emotions that they began to cry.
- Passive voice is often used in scientific writing to decenter a researcher - to make the experiment or activity the subject the subject.
- This is an attempt at neutrality or invoking objective language.

Tip 5 - Present Results in Multiple Ways

- Statistics have to be backed up by tests (e.g. don't say we found a z-score, explain what a z-score is)
- Percentages always have real numbers behind them (e.g. 54% of participants (n=17) were female)
- Graphs, charts, or visualizations are not explanations -they have to be explained and interpreted

Tip 6 - Answer your research questions

- In the discussion section - return to your research questions
- Explain the answers you have - even if they are incomplete
- Give the reader a sense of your certainty about the answers

Tip 7 - Limitations are liberating

- State the limitations of your research project
 - We only sampled a portion of the population
 - Our sample contained more X than is typical of our population
 - We found X, but Y might also be the case. Given the limited time frame of our study - we return to this potential research in the following section.
- Limitations are liberating they tell your reader that you are aware of what might be a blind spot or a drawback of your findings

Tip 8 - Review each section

- One of my pet-peeves is when the introduction and literature review of a paper is longer than the results and discussion
- The point of new research is to provide new knowledge
- Try to set yourself limits
- When finished - cut from intro or lit review first

Tip 9 - Conclusions are not unanswered questions

- The conclusion should reaffirm what you have found, and place it in a particular context (e.g. What they said and what we said from your abstract)
- Future directions are an important component of the conclusion section - they provide a way to suggest you have thought about overcoming the limitations previously stated
- Unanswered questions can be mentioned - but simply laundry listing new questions is a bad practice