

## 7.1 Discussion of research findings

This section of the Research Gateway shows you how to discuss the results that you have found in relation to both your research questions and existing knowledge. This is your opportunity to highlight how your research reflects, differs from and extends current knowledge of the area in which you have chosen to carry out research. This section is your chance to demonstrate exactly what you know about this topic by interpreting your findings and outlining what they mean. At the end of your discussion you should have discussed all of the results that you found and provided an explanation for your findings.

A Discussion section should not be simply a summary of the results you have found and at this stage you will have to demonstrate original thinking. First, you should highlight and discuss how your research has reinforced what is already known about the area. Many students make the mistake of thinking that they should have found something new; in fact, very few research projects have findings that are unique. Instead, you are likely to have a number of findings that reinforce what is already known about the field and you need to highlight these, explaining why you think this has occurred.

Second, you may have discovered something different and if this is the case, you will have plenty to discuss! You should outline what is new and how this compares to what is already known. You should also attempt to provide an explanation as to why your research identified these differences. Third, you need to consider how your results extend knowledge about the field. Even if you found similarities between your results and the existing work of others, your research extends knowledge of the area, by reinforcing current thinking. You should state how it does this as this is a legitimate finding!

It is important that this section is comprehensive and well structured, making clear links back to the literature you reviewed earlier in the project. This will allow you the opportunity to demonstrate the value of your research and it is therefore very important to discuss your work thoroughly. The resources in this section of the Gateway should help you to:

- interpret the research – the key to a good discussion is a clear understanding of what the research means. This can only be done if the results are interpreted correctly;
- discuss coherently – a good discussion presents a coherent, well structured explanation that accounts for the findings of the research, making links between the evidence obtained and existing knowledge.

As always, use the Gateway resources ***appropriately***. As usual, the resources have been included because we believe they provide accessible, practical and helpful information on how to discuss your work. On the other hand, don't forget that your institution will have requirements of you and your project that override any information that you get from this Gateway. For example, you might not have to produce a separate discussion section as this may need to be included with the presentation of results. This is often the

case for qualitative research, so you must be sure what is needed. Find out, and then use the Gateway accordingly.

## 7.2 What the Discussion links cover

The section connects you to a number of sources that can help you to come to an understanding of what is required to discuss the results of your research and how to write it. The sources in this section tend to fall into two main areas.

- There are sources that outline the purpose of a discussion section and provide information on how this can be structured and organised. This is important as it helps the reader to understand what your research has found.
- There are sources that outline strategies for presenting your discussion by highlighting various techniques to presenting a logical, coherent argument. More importantly, they outline ways of using the evidence that you have found, to present your arguments and therefore allow you to make the most of your research data.

## 7.3 Using the Discussion section

Local context:

- Find out what is required of you! Do you have to write a separate discussion chapter? Should it include direct links to existing literature or is this to be done in a subsequent section?
- Are there written guidelines on what is required?
- Can you look at examples produced by previous students? If so, are you sure that they were assessed by the same criteria?
- Do you now understand what you are aiming for? If not, can your supervisor clarify it for you?

Using the Gateway:

- This section only contains a few sources and therefore you should skim all of the contents. You can then select those sources which are most relevant to your requirements.
- As the sources all say pretty much the same thing, you may prefer to rely mainly on one source, however, we suggest that you at least read a few. Each of the sources has at least one new 'trick' that may help!
- Remember that this original source material was NOT written specifically for you. Local requirements overrule the Gateway every time!

And finally -

This is an exciting stage of your project. You have the opportunity to prove how valuable your research is in terms of its contribution to existing knowledge. Even if you feel that what you have discovered has either been found before or is insignificant, your research has a place in the knowledge base of the area. Make sure you take the opportunity to outline the contribution that your hard work has made!

## 7.4 Discussion checklist

This checklist is based on the typical requirements for discussing your research. Some of the questions below may not be relevant, depending on what your institution requires of you.

<b>Local Requirements</b>	
· do you know what form your discussion section can/must take?	
· is there a word limit? What is it?	
· will your supervisor read a draft?	
· is there work from previous students you can look at? Were they assessed by the same criteria as you?	
<b>General Requirements</b>	
· have you provided a brief summary of your results at the start of the section to remind the reader what you have found?	
· have you explained the key findings of your research?	
· have you placed your results in the context of existing knowledge by comparing your findings with the existing literature?	
· have you considered your findings in the light of your research questions?	
· have you outlined the implications of your research for academic understanding?	
<b>Academic Writing</b>	
· have you provided a convincing explanation of your research?	
· have you proof read your conclusions?	
· have you included full reference details in a consistent and approved form?	
· have you laid it out clearly so that it looks quite nice??!!	

## 7.5 Discussion resources

Source	Content and use
7.5.1: <a href="#">discussion chapters</a>  From the University of Wollongong	A short explanation of the role of a discussion chapter and how to write it. Unfortunately as it comes from the Faculty of Science, the examples used are not overly appropriate...but you'll get the idea!
7.5.2: <a href="#">general discussion</a>  From the Academic Grammar site	Again pretty brief, but very clear about how to discuss your research. It provides a simple overview of what is required and provides links to material that shows you how to match claims to the evidence that you have found. This in itself makes the site worth a look.
7.5.3: <a href="#">discussion</a>  From the AIT site	This section (of what should now be a familiar site) provides a straightforward explanation of the purpose and content of a discussion section. It provides a couple of examples and as usual tells you what not to do!
7.5.4: <a href="#">strategies for arguments</a>  From the Academic Grammar site	This part of the Academic Grammar site shows you how to put together a logical argument. It discusses a number of techniques that will help you to make the best of your findings in the context of your research questions and existing literature.