Introduction to Report Writing

PSYC 2040

Introduction to Report Writing

Research is complete only when the results are shared with the scientific community. The traditional medium of communicating research results is via report form in scientific journals.

Empirical reports consist of distinct sections that reflect the stages in the research process (see next slide for details)

Sections in an Empirical Report

Title page	The topic of research, your name and affiliation.
Abstract	A clear and concise summary of the report.
Introduction	Development of the problem under investigation and statement of the purpose of the study.
Method	Description of the method used to conduct the investigation, enabling replication by independent researchers.
Results	Report of the results that were found, using both descriptive and inferential statistics.
Discussion	Interpretation and discussion of the implications of the results.
References	The past research cited in the report.

Title Page

- No longer than 15 words
- Should be a concise statement of the main topic and should identify
  - actual variables or theoretical issues under investigation
  - relation between these variables *(e.g., the effects of audience on performance)*

Abstract

- A clear summary and overview of the report
- Often determines whether the report is read or not
- Must correctly reflect the paper (i.e., what appears in the abstract must appear in the report).
- It should describe in 100-150 words:
  - the problem under investigation
  - the number of participants
  - research design and procedure
  - findings
  - conclusions and implications or applications

Introduction

- After an initial statement of the main issue of interest that is dealt with in the paper, a funneling approach should be adopted. Introduce general issues, definitions and theories and then funnel down to specific hypotheses.

What belongs in your introduction?

The purpose of your introduction is to provide a rationale for your study:

- What is this study about?
- Why is the issue important?
- Why is this study being done?
  - Is there a gap in the literature that your study addresses?
- Why were your general methods chosen?
  - But save extensive details of your methods for the Method section

Anything that does not answer these 4 questions does not belong in your introduction.

What does NOT belong in your introduction?

- A summary of everything you've ever read that's vaguely related to the topic
- Theoretical speculations that you're not testing in the research
- Any claims that are not supported by either:
  - Empirical evidence
  - Logical argument
- Anything that does not answer the 4 key questions

A) Introduce problem

Start with a short, clear statement of the question or problem to be addressed:

- to test a particular theory
- to extend a relationship between variables
- to determine the reliability of previous results
- to clarify inconsistencies in the literature.

Whatever the reason for your study, briefly state at the beginning of the introduction what the problem is about (don't assume the reader has read the abstract).

Ways to engage a reader's interest in the topic…

- Talk about a vivid example of the concept from real life
- Introduce a controversy/debate within a field
- Briefly describe an application of the research that is important to society

B) Develop the background (broad)

- Provide definitions of key terms.
- Discuss and evaluate relevant theory in the area.
- If you summarise earlier research, avoid non-essential details – instead, emphasise pertinent findings, relevant methodological issues, + major conclusions.
- Demonstrate the logical continuity between previous and present work.

B) Develop the background (broad) continued

- **Controversial views** should be treated fairly, regardless of your personal viewpoint. A simple statement that certain studies support one conclusion and others support another conclusion is adequate.
- **Inconsistent results** can also be presented in this way: state that some studies find evidence for one conclusion, whereas others find evidence for another
- Explain what is "missing" in the existing literature, or what the next interesting question is that needs to be addressed (i.e., the one your experiment investigates!)

C) State the purpose and rationale (be very specific)

- After you have introduced the problem + developed the background material, you are in a position to describe what you did.
- Make this statement in the closing paragraphs of the introduction.
- You should briefly summarize your design/procedure before presenting predictions.
- Give a formal statement of your hypotheses.
  - What variable was manipulated, and why was it chosen?
  - What results are expected and why?
  - What is the logic behind the expected results?
  - Clearly develop the rationale for each hypothesis.

Notes on the Introduction

- One common mistake is to spring a hypothesis on the reader out of the blue
- Your hypothesis must flow naturally, coherently and with argued justification from your appraisal of the research topic
- Predictions should be detailed and specific → you may end up with multiple predictions
- Your literature review must lead up to your hypotheses → extra references detract from the report if they are not relevant to your hypotheses
- You must provide a rationale for why your study is important or necessary → a major problem with many introductions is that the rationale for the study is not made clear enough

Writing a Clear Paragraph

- Know what point you're trying to make in each paragraph
- The topic sentence of each paragraph should give the reader an idea of the key point
- The body of the paragraph presents your arguments or evidence for that point, or gives necessary detail
- Separate ideas and separate points go in ***separate*** paragraphs