Writing the Discussion

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Discussion section of a manuscript: function

- To interpret findings in light of what was already known about the subject
- Explain our new understanding after your results
- Will connect to introduction, the literature cited, the objectives phrased: how did the results change the situation?
Discussion section of a manuscript: Organization

- KEY RESULTS Summarize key results with reference to study objectives
- LIMITATIONS Discuss limitations of the study, taking into account sources of potential bias or imprecision. Discuss both direction and magnitude of any potential bias
- INTERPRETATION Give a cautious overall interpretation of results considering objectives, limitations, multiplicity of analysis, results from similar studies, and other relevant evidence
- GENERALISABILITY (may be part of limitations paragraph) Discuss the generalisability, i.e. external validity, of the study results
- CONCLUSION Concluding the discussion, maybe policy implications, maybe need of further research
Discussion section of a manuscript: basic questions and principles (1)

• Do the results provide answers to your research questions/address your objectives?
• Do the findings agree with what others have found, to theory (if appropriate)?
• If not: Alternative explanations? Weakness in your design, in others’ studies?
• Given your conclusions, what is our new understanding of the subject area?
• If warranted, what is the next step in practice and in research?
Discussion section of a manuscript: basic questions and principles (2)

- Use the same key terms and the same verb tense (present tense) as in aims/ objectives
- Discuss all key findings (also “no difference”, “not significant”, “not expected” etc.)
- Discuss and evaluate conflicting explanations of results (good papers do that)
- Please remember that statistical significance is not a measure of “effect”. Evaluate the public health importance of your findings
- Be brief and concise! Avoid general and vague words and phrases that may be misunderstood! Avoid empty words and phrases!

https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/2/