



Writing a Discussion Chapter

I. What Is a Discussion Chapter?

In the Results chapter you presented *facts* that you discovered in your research and described them using words or numbers, or both. Once you've described the results of your study, you are now in a position to explain what the results mean. The Discussion chapter is for you to make *points* about your findings and to interpret them as you do the following:

- consolidate your research space by stating what you've learned;
- consider your findings in light of existing research (i.e., relate findings to the reviewed literature);
- indicate the limitations of your study (e.g., weaknesses or what cannot be concluded from the study);
- recommend a course of action and/or identify useful areas of further research.

II. Preparing to Write the Discussion Chapter

Here are two suggestions for preparing to write the chapter:

1. List things that you know and that you didn't know when you began the research; connect each to the reviewed literature and to the theoretical/conceptual framework.

Findings	Connection to Literature	Theoretical Connection
1.		
2.		
3.		

2. Write down your responses using the following prompts.
 - a. Summarize what you did, how you did it, and why
 - b. Summarize what you found (answer your research questions)
 - c. Reflect on the results
 - What was congruent with the literature?
 - What was surprising?
 - What problems did you encounter?
 - What did your findings not help you understand?
 - What questions remained unanswered? Why?
 - What did your research not address?
 - d. Reflect on the value of your research in the field

III. Writing the Discussion Chapter

A. Opening a Discussion Section

- **Report your accomplishments by highlighting major findings.**
Overall, . . . (*The overall results indicate . . . The results indicate, overall, that . . .*)
In general, . . . (*In general, the experimental samples resisted . . .*)
On the whole, . . .
With . . . exception(s), . . . (*With one exception, the experimental samples resisted . . .*)

- **Relate and evaluate your data in the light of previous research.**

Similarities

Our data support/confirm/verify the work of X by showing that . . .

By demonstrating . . . , our study extends the findings of Y.

Our data are consistent with X's hypothesis that . . .

Differences

The results of our study contradict/refute Y's conclusion that . . .

These findings call into question the widely accepted theory that . . .

One explanation for X's finding of . . . is that An alternative explanation is

The difference between . . . and . . . is probably due to

These findings challenge the work of earlier researchers, who tended to assume that

- **Interpret your data by making suggestions as to why your results are the way they are.**
 - to express a moderate level of confidence
 - *The data suggest/hint/imply . . .*
 - to express a greater degree of confidence
 - *Our results show/demonstrate*
- **Anticipate and deal with potential criticism (if necessary).**
Researchers (give example) who take a . . . approach might view our results differently.
This interpretation of the data might be criticized by X, who has argued that
Some (give examples) may argue that this experimental design fails to account for
My explanation accounts for . . . but does not explain . . . because

B. Discussing the Limitations of the Study

- **State limitations/weaknesses**
It should be noted that this study has been primarily concerned with . . .
This analysis has concentrated on . . .
The findings of this study are restricted to . . .
This study has addressed only the question of . . .
Because my findings account for . . . rather than . . . , I would say

We would like to point out that we have not . . .
In summary, our study shows that . . . , but the issue of . . . remains unresolved.

- **State what cannot be concluded from the study**

However, the findings do not imply . . .
The results of this study cannot be taken as evidence for . . .
Unfortunately, we are unable to determine from this data . . .
The lack of . . . means that we cannot be certain

C. Discuss Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

- **Discuss implications**

X is important because
Ultimately, what is at stake here is
The finding that . . . should be of interest to . . . because
These findings have important consequences for the broader domain of

- **Introduce areas of further research**

These results open the door to studies that
The methodology developed in this study will be useful for
Our findings are the first step toward
Further work in this area may lead to the development of

Writing the Discussion chapter involves engaging in conversation about your research!

As you write, discuss your ideas with your committee members
and come talk to us about your research.

Sources

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