ALEC 604: Writing for Professional Publication

Week 8: Findings and Discussion

Activities
- Discuss the order for reporting results
- Examine the contents found in the discussion
- Examine the relationships between previous sections and the discussion
- Develop mock results, tables, and figures

Findings
- A very easy section to write
  - Logically answers each research question/hypothesis
  - Report data from this study only (exact $P$ values, etc.)
  - Include tables, graphs, etc., for data presentation
- Includes:
  - All relevant findings
  - Unexpected findings, contrary to your hypotheses
- Save conclusions/implications for discussion

Report the Basic Findings
- Demographics
  - Gender ratios
  - Age
  - Residence
  - Race
  - Other relevant variables of interest
- Present group measures, then report on individual components, outliers, etc.

Primary Findings
- Start by restating the first hypothesis or research objective
- Remind readers of the behaviors measured and/or statistical operations performed
- Report, in brief narrative form, the major findings, then follow paragraph with all findings in table format

Primary Findings
- Repeat the process used for first hypothesis or research objective for each remaining one
- Always indicate the correct table number when referring to findings in narrative form
- Don’t forget to use transitional sentences to move from one finding to the next
Other General Considerations

- Narratives always supplement rather than repeat data presented in tables, figures, etc.
- Tabular data must agree with the narrative
- Avoid overwhelming readers with irrelevant data
- Prose should be simple, concise, accurate, and always written in past tense
- Common errors: discussing results, missing data

Figures and Tables

- If data can be described with one or two numbers, don’t use a table
- For more than two numbers, add a figure or table summarizing the relevant data
- Correctly title all figures and tables
- Create clear and complete titles

Figures and Tables

- All tables or figures must be mentioned in the text before including them in the manuscript
- Refer to all tables as tables and to all graphs, pictures, or drawings as figures (APA Manual, p. 21)
- Remind readers what to look for in tables and figures

Statistics

- Very important, but should be second to the description of the findings
- Always state results first, and then report its statistical significance
- Never report a statistical test without full interpretation
- Choose statistics that accurately convey the behaviors of your participants

Writing the Discussion

- Present the principles, relationships, and generalizations from your findings
- Briefly discuss—don’t repeat—the findings
- Written in present tense, active voice—except for results, which are described in past tense
- Discuss other studies in the context of your findings
- This section can be harder to write than others
  - A common reason for rejection by journal editors

Structure for the Discussion

- Begin the discussion by:
  - Answering each research question
  - Stating a direct signal:
    - Academic achievement increased when…
    - Participants who…
  - Stating your conclusions, based on your findings
  - Explaining your most important findings first
Structure for the Discussion

- Transition to the middle of the discussion by:
  - Interpreting your results
  - Discussing key studies—only those relevant to your work
  - Comparing your work with others’ work
  - Presenting ambiguous results and discrepancies with others’ studies objectively
  - Explaining unexpected findings
  - Describing limitations briefly

- End the discussion by:
  - Writing strong conclusions with a signal:
    - In summary…, In conclusion…
  - Mentioning implications if appropriate
  - Suggesting future research, if necessary
  - Using present tense except when making comparisons to previous studies or findings
  - Summarizing the significance of your study

Consider: Findings vs. Conclusions

- Findings are direct observations summarized and integrated by statistical analyses
  - The mean knowledge scores of group A were significantly higher than group B.
- Conclusions are the inferences made based on the findings
  - Therefore, group A learned more than group B about ___________.

Assume Nothing

- What you’ve learned may not be obvious to readers; describe for them what you’ve learned
- Significance of your study…SO WHAT?
  - Don’t leave the readers asking, “So what?”
- Expose the truth, revealed by your data
  - Don’t extrapolate beyond your data
  - Small truths are more convincing than big illusions

Discussion and Other Sections

- Discuss how your findings and interpretations agree (or contrast) with previously published works
- Discuss theoretical implications and possible practical applications or recommendations for practice
  - Both points above must be in reference to the material in your introduction/literature review

Summary

- Use a formulaic approach to reporting results
  - Refer to original research objectives/hypotheses
- Writing the discussion can be difficult because it requires higher-order thinking skills
  - Focus on relationship between your findings and others’ studies reported in the literature review
  - Describe the significance of your study and its impact on the body of knowledge