

Intensive Course in Research Writing

Barbara Gastel, MD, MPH
Texas A&M University
Summer 2016

Intensive Course in Research Writing: Session 4 (30 June 2016)

Today

- Guest presentation: giving a 15-minute talk
- Presentation/discussion: writing the results section
- Mini-workshop: results sections
- Presentation/discussion: tables and figures
- Mini-workshop: tables and figures
- Workshop: drafts of methods sections

Guest Presentation: Giving a 15-Minute Talk

The Results Section

The Results Section

- The core of the paper
- Often includes tables, figures, or both
- Should summarize findings rather than providing data in great detail
- Should present results but not comment on them
- (Note: Some journals, however, combine the Results and the Discussion.)

Verb Tense for the Results Section: Past Tense

Examples from “Seven-Year Efficacy of RTS,S/AS01 Malaria Vaccine among Young African Children” (published in today’s issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*):

- “Of the 447 children enrolled in the original trial, 312 **completed** all three extensions of follow-up . . .”
- “Efficacy **was** consistently lower in the cohort with high exposure to malaria parasites than in the cohort with low exposure (Table 2).”
- “All cases of severe malaria **resolved** without long-term sequelae.”

Results Sections of Papers with Tables or Figures

- How much should the information in the text overlap that in the tables and figures?
 - Not extensive overlap
 - In general, text should present only the main points from the tables and figures
 - Perhaps also include a few of the most important data
- Remember to mention each table or figure. Do so as soon as readers might want to see it.

Mentioning Tables and Figures: Some Writing Advice

- In citing tables and figures, emphasize the finding, not the table or figure.
 - *Not so good*: Table 3 shows that researchers who took this course published twice as many papers per year.
 - *Better*: Researchers who took this course published twice as many papers per year (Table 3).

Mini-Workshop: Results Sections

- Look at the instructions to authors from your target journal. What, if anything, does it say about the results section?
- Look at the results section of your model paper. Notice items such as the following:
 - Length and organization
 - Wording
 - Inclusion of subheads (or not)
 - Number of tables and figures
- Be ready to discuss your observations.

Announcements etc

- For tomorrow
 - Reading due
 - Writing due: revised draft of methods section
 - Optional item: example of poster
- Signup sheets
- Questions

Some Resources

- Items on rights and permissions
- SHERPA/RoMEO: Publisher Copyright Policies and Self-Archiving (<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/index.php>)
“Use this site to find a summary of permissions that are normally given as part of each publisher’s copyright transfer agreement.”
- OneLook Dictionary Search (<http://www.onelook.com/>)
(lets you look up words in multiple dictionaries)

Tables and Figures: Some Basics

First: What points from the reading on tables and figures might be especially useful to remember?

Tables: A Few Suggestions

- Use tables only if text will not suffice.
- Design tables to be understandable without the text.
- Organize each table in a logical way.
- If a paper includes a series of tables, use the same format for each.
- Be sure to follow the instructions to authors.

Figures: A Few Suggestions

- Use figures (graphs, diagrams, maps, photographs, etc) only if they will help convey your information.
- Avoid including too much information in one figure.
- Make sure that any lettering will be large enough once published.
- Follow the journal's instructions.

Discussion Question

- If you have data that could be presented in either a table or a figure, how do you decide which one to use?

A General Suggestion

- Look at tables and figures in journal articles presenting research similar to yours
 - In your target journal
 - In other good journals
- Use these tables and figures as models when designing your own tables and figures.

Sources of Further Information

- “Almost Everything You Wanted to Know About Making Tables and Figures,” Department of Biology, Bates College
(<http://abacus.bates.edu/~ganderso/biology/resources/writing/HTWtablefigs.html>)
- Writing and Publishing Scientific Papers, Part 2 (from China Medical Board course, accessible at <http://www.authoraid.info/en/resources/details/1065/>)

Mini-Workshop: Tables and Figures

- Look at the instructions to authors from your target journal. What, if anything, do they say about tables and figures?
- Look at the tables and figures in your model paper and any other tables and figures you brought.
 - What are some strengths of these tables and figures?
 - What do you think could have been improved?
 - What other observations or questions do you have?

Workshop: Drafts of Methods Sections

- Read your group members' methods sections fairly quickly, to get the general meaning.
- Read each methods section more carefully, and write comments on it.
- Discuss each methods section, noting strengths and then providing suggestions.
- Give the commented-on methods sections to the authors.

Wishing you a good afternoon!