

Facilitator Notes

# Writing the Discussion

These notes accompany the PowerPoint presentation of the same title by Barbara Gastel.

This module normally would accompany modules on writing other parts of a journal article.

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| Module Title | Writing the Discussion |
| Course title (or analogous information) | This module typically would be part of a workshop or course largely on writing and publishing journal articles on research. It is part of a set of four modules, each on writing one of the four main parts of a journal article in the IMRAD structure (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion).These modules may be presented in different orders, depending on the facilitator’s preference. One option is to present the modules in the order in which the sections appear in an article (Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion). Another option, especially if each participant will write or revise an article during the workshop or course, is to present the modules in an order that authors often write articles (for example, Methods, Results, Discussion, Introduction). |
| Unit Title | Not applicable |
| No. of Unit | Not applicable |
| Session Day/Time | Not applicable |
| Length of Session | This module typically would run about 45 to 60 minutes if participants have not brought drafts to revise. If they have brought drafts, it typically would run 60 to 90 minutes. If the module is in a workshop or course where participants write journal articles, it can be advisable to (1) have the course participants draft their discussions after this session and (2) have participants meet in small groups on a later date to read and provide feedback on each other’s drafts of the section. |
| Aim | This module is intended mainly to increase participants’ ability to write suitable discussion sections of journal articles. |
| Learning Outcomes | By the end of this module, participants will be able to state (1) the purposes of the discussion, (2) types of content to include, or consider including, in a discussion, and (3) an appropriate overall structure for a discussion. |
| Facilitator Profile | Ideally, this workshop would be facilitated by someone who has experience with research writing (for example, as an author of journal articles or as an editor), because such an individual can enrich the content with examples from his or her experience. However, a less experienced facilitator also can present the module, as the combination of PowerPoint slides and facilitator notes provides sufficient information to do so. Also, the module can be presented jointly by a facilitator and a co-facilitator who provides additional commentary. |
| Participant Profile | This module is primarily for early-career researchers who are starting to publish their work. It also may be useful to mid-career researchers who wish to improve their writing or increase their ability to mentor others in research writing. In addition, it may be helpful to some editors and writing instructors. |
| Pre-workshop Activities | (1) If possible, each participant should bring a set of instructions to authors. Ideally, the instructions should be for a journal in which the participant hopes to publish. If at least some participants will not or might not bring instructions to authors, the facilitator should, if possible, bring some instructions to authors or links thereto.(2) If possible, each participant should bring a journal article reporting research in his or her field. Ideally, it should report research related to the participant’s research and should be in a journal in which the participant hopes to publish. If at least some participants will not or might not bring articles, the facilitator should, if possible, bring some articles or some links to articles.(3) If the participants have drafted journal articles, they should bring drafts of their articles. |
| Room Layout | Ideally, this module will be presented in a room layout facilitating interaction—for example, with several small tables, with tables in a U configuration, or with a conference table. However, this module also can be presented in a traditional classroom or a lecture hall. |
| Number of Participants | For optimum discussion, the number of participants should be limited to about 10–15. However, the module also can reasonably delivered to about 25 participants.  |
| Files and Materials | PowerPoint file: 11\_Writing the Discussion SectionsExamples of Discussions: If possible, the facilitator should bring one or more examples of discussions. Ideally, the discussions should be from journals in research fields from which some of the participants come. The facilitator may use examples from these discussions at times in the module that seem suitable.[Note: Another resource to consider using with these four modules is the annotated journal article at <http://www.authoraid.info/en/resources/details/648/>. Facilitators may, for example, do one or more of the following: (1) use this resource as a source of background information, (2) show the respective sections of this resource when discussing the corresponding sections of a journal article, (3) have participants look at this resource as a review after the set of four modules on sections of an article, or (4) as a course assignment, have participants read this resource and then annotate an article from their own field.] |
| Visual Aids and Resources | Computer with PowerPoint; projector for PowerPoint presentation; Internet connection if possible |
| Potential Embellishments of the PowerPoint | To keep the file small, the presentation consists almost solely of text. Images can be added to make it more visually appealing. For example, decorative images can be inserted between sections to signal a change of subtopic and provide visual relief. Also, relevant images can be added to selected slides if desired. If desired, the facilitator can divide the material on a given slide into more than one slide or can format some slides for progressive disclosure, in which items on a slide are revealed one by one.The facilitator may add slides showing relevant excerpts from journal articles. Another option is to link to journal articles to show. |
| Learning methods and activities | The following notes may help facilitators to (1) elaborate on the content of some slides and (2) elicit group participation at suitable times. In the PowerPoint presentation, similar notes appear in the notes sections below the respective slides.* (Slide 1 is a title slide.)
* Slide 2 (“Overview”)
	+ Note the topics that the module will address.
	+ Note the module’s overall aim, which is stated earlier in this facilitator’s guide. (Feel free, of course, to frame it in the way that the group is likely to find most relevant.)
* Slide 3 (“What are some purposes of the discussion section?”)
	+ Have groups of two or three participants address this question.
	+ Then bring the full group together and elicit purposes to list. If the following purposes do not come up, note them: (1) to address the questions/hypotheses posed in the introduction, (2) to identify strengths and limitations of the study, (3) to show how the findings relate to those of previous research, (4) to identify implications and applications of the findings, and (5) to identify needs for further research. (Perhaps note that not all discussions have all these purposes.)
	+ Indicate that the purposes should guide the choice of content.
* Slide 4 (“Discussion”)
	+ Note: Starting with a summary of the main findings helps orient readers to what will be discussed. It can be especially helpful to readers who begin by looking at the discussion.
	+ Emphasize that the discussion should answer the question(s) posed in the introduction (or if hypotheses were posed, say whether the findings support the hypotheses). If the answer still is unclear, the discussion should say so. A common problem is a mismatch between what the introduction asks and what the discussion answers. An analogy to consider using is that it’s like asking “How was lunch?” and having someone answer “The weather is good today.” The latter might be true, but it’s not what was asked.
* Slide 5 (“The Discussion: Some Possible Content”)
	+ Participants sometimes are surprised that mentioning strengths and limitations can advisable. However, noting major strengths is not immodest; it’s part of showing the validity of the study. And mentioning significant limitations is part of being truthful—and generally works better than having others discover the limitations and think the authors did not know of them.
	+ Of course, authors should mention only substantial strengths and limitations.
	+ If the facilitator has experience mentioning strengths or limitations in discussion sections, or in peer reviewing papers that do so, mentioning and briefly discussing this experience can be worthwhile.
* Slide 6 (“The Discussion: Possible Content (cont)”)
	+ Note that the discussion should place the current findings in the context of previous research.
	+ Perhaps observe that being able to look beyond one’s own work and relate it to other work in the field tends to be a characteristic of a scholar who is academically mature.
* Slide 7 (“The Discussion: Possible Content (cont)”)
	+ Note here that the discussion should put findings in their broader context.
	+ Perhaps observe that this broader context should be that which was presented near the beginning of the introduction.
* Slide 8 (“The Discussion: Possible Content (cont)”)
	+ Note that it is common to mention research needed to address questions that remain.
	+ Perhaps state, though, that mentioning other research needed is optional and should be done only if there is something relevant and substantial to say in this regard.
* Slide 9 (“Structure of the Discussion”)
	+ Note that whereas the introduction moves from general to specific, the discussion moves from specific (the research being reported) to somewhat more general (related research) to yet more general (broader implications).
	+ Note that if an article does not have a conclusions section, the last paragraph tends to serve as a conclusion, summarizing what is to be concluded based on the research.
	+ Now can be a good time to show or summarize a discussion that is structured in this way.
* Slide 10 (“Overall Structure of a Paper: Like an Hourglass”)
	+ This slide also appears in the presentation about the introduction. If the module about the introduction already has been presented, this slide and the discussion of it will serve as review.
	+ As noted in that module:
		- The top part of the hourglass is the introduction, which, as noted, is funnel-shaped: beginning broad (with general context), then narrowing down somewhat (to research related to the current research), and then focusing narrowly on the current research.
		- The narrow middle of the hourglass consists of the methods and results sections, both of which focus narrowly on the current research.
		- The lower part of the hourglass is the discussion, which generally is like an inverted funnel, starting narrow (by focusing on the current research), then broadening somewhat (by relating the current research to previous research), and ending broadly (for example, by noting overall implications of the research).
* Slide 11 (“Exercise”)
	+ Have the participants do this exercise in small groups.
	+ Then bring the full group together for discussion.
* Slide 12 (“Another Exercise”)
	+ If most or all of the participants have brought drafts of their discussions, do this exercise.
	+ Another option is to have participants draft their discussions after this module and then do this exercise at a later session.
	+ This exercise is well suited for groups of about three or four members.
	+ If feasible, have the full group come together for discussion at the end of this exercise. One option is to proceed as follows: (1) Have participants note some strengths that they observed in other group members’ discussions. (2) Have participants wishing to do so identify some helpful guidance that they received during the exercise. (3) Answer any questions, either along the way or at the end.
	+ If this session will be the first one in which participants provide feedback on each other’s drafts, perhaps precede this exercise with some discussion of giving feedback. Suggestions for giving feedback appear at <http://www.authoraid.info/en/news/details/1058/>, <http://www.authoraid.info/en/news/details/649/>, and <http://www.authoraid.info/en/news/details/302/>. Also, suggestions for receiving feedback appear at <http://www.authoraid.info/en/news/details/1059/>. Of course, some facilitators might need to adapt the advice on giving feedback to the cultural context.
* Slide 13 (“In Conclusion”)
	+ If time permits, include a question-and-answer session before ending. If this module is the last one presented in the unit, perhaps make time for questions not only about material in this module but also about material in earlier modules.
	+ Perhaps do one or both of the following:
		- Have participants note points to remember.
		- Summarize the session.
	+ If the workshop or course will include later modules, note the topic of the next module. Perhaps also note more generally what will follow.
	+ Perhaps encourage group members to share points from this session with others.
* Slide 14 (“Wishing you much success in writing journal articles!”)
	+ Include this slide if this module is the last one being presented on writing journal articles about one’s research. (If another module is being used as the last one, moving this slide to the end of that module is suggested.)
	+ When presenting this slide, say that you hope that this series of modules has been helpful, and wish the participants much success in writing and publishing journal articles.
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