

Guide to Writing a Research Report for Psychology

Included in this guide are suggestions for formatting and writing each component of a research report as well as tips for writing in a style appropriate for Psychology papers. Remember, it is always best to check with your department-approved writing book and your professor if you have any questions or concerns.

Component 1: The Title Page

- On the right side of the header, type the first 2-3 words of your full title followed by the page number. This header will appear on every page of your report.
- At the top of the page, type flush left the words “Running head:” followed by an abbreviation of your title in all caps. This abbreviation should consist of the key words in your title and should be no more than 50 characters, spaces and punctuation included.
- A couple of lines down, center your full title. The full title should identify your topic as precisely as possible using about 10-12 words. Often it is a good idea to incorporate your independent and dependent variables into the title.
- Underneath the full title, type your name. Under your name, type the organization you are writing your paper for (most likely University of Portland).
- Your title, name and organization should be double-spaced.

Component 2: The Abstract

- Start a new page and center the word “Abstract” at the top of the page.
- The Abstract should not be written until you have finished all the other components of your report because it is a summary of your entire report.
- The Abstract should tell your reader:
 - Your research question
 - The participants (including how many were used)
 - The method used to investigate your question
 - Your results
 - The implications of your results
- Do not indent the first line of the Abstract and only use one paragraph.
- All sections of your paper should be double-spaced, including the Abstract.
- The Abstract should be no more than 120 words.
- Be concise but specific. Do not include any unnecessary information.
- If you are having a hard time, try writing a one-sentence summary for each section of your paper.

Component 3: The Introduction

- Start a new page and center your full title at the top of the page.
- Type flush left and indent the first line of every paragraph.
- Begin the first paragraph of the Introduction with a sentence that introduces your topic. It’s ok to make a general statement; the point is to introduce your reader to what your paper is about.

- The rest of the first paragraph will give some general information about your topic and briefly discuss how it has been addressed in previous research. If you need to define any relevant terms, here is the place to do so.
- Next is the Lit Review. Before you begin to write, decide on what order you will address the studies that you found. Do not just summarize the research chronologically; instead, organize the research by topic. You will also want to start out broad and then narrow to your topic, which usually means that you should start with the studies that are loosely connected to your own study and end with the studies that are most closely related to your study.
- At the end of the Introduction, you need to state your hypothesis. You can do this explicitly by saying something like “The purpose of this study was to...” or “The present study was designed to investigate...”. It is very important to relate your hypothesis back to the studies that you referenced in your Lit Review so that your hypothesis has some basis in previous research. Make sure to clearly express this connection.
- You may also want to include a very broad overview of the method you will use to test your hypothesis.

Component 4: The Method Section

- Do not start a new page. Center the word “Method” at the start of the section.
- This section will contain a detailed account of what you did so that someone else can conduct the experiment exactly as you did if needed.
- The Method section usually is divided into three subsections: participants, materials and procedure.
- Underneath “Method”, type flush left the word “Participants” and italicize it. This subsection should describe who participated in your study. You will want to include information about the number of participants used in the study, where they come from and the selection criteria as well as any other important characteristics like age, sex, education level, or occupation. Be sure to mention if participants were given any type of reward or motivation to encourage them to participate in the study.
- Underneath the Participants section, type flush left the word “Materials” and italicize it. This subsection should document any materials or equipment used in your study such as a stopwatch, slide projector, specific papers, word lists or any other supplies.
- Underneath the Materials section, type flush left the word “Procedure” and italicize it. This subsection should present a complete summary of what happened in the study. You should include:
 - The experimental design that was used (between, within, mixed), and the independent and dependent variables
 - Any controls that were used
 - How participants were assigned to conditions
 - Important aspects of the instructions given to participants
 - What the participants did, step-by-step

Component 5: The Results Section

- Do not start a new page. Center the word “Results” at the start of the section.
- This section will include a concise summary of the data you have collected and the results of the statistical analysis if you performed one. Along with a summary of your data, you might include:
 - Results of descriptive and inferential statistical analyses
 - Rejection or retention of the null hypothesis
 - If an effect is found, the direction of the effect
 - If necessary, a summary table or tables of the results
 - If necessary, a figure or figures to display the data
- Do not interpret your findings; that will be part of the Discussion.

Component 6: The Discussion

- Do not start a new page. Center the word “Discussion” at the start of the section.
- In this section, you will interpret your findings and describe the implications of your study.
- In your Discussion, make sure to:
 - 1) Discuss your results in relation to your hypothesis. Did your results support your hypothesis? If so, how?
 - 2) Compare your results to those of the studies mentioned in your Lit Review.
 - 3) Identify and discuss limitations in the experimental design that may have reduced the strength of your results. Were there any confounding variables? Was your sample size too small?
 - 4) Make suggestions for future research. If you were to perform the study again, how might you change it? Would it be a good idea to study a different demographic?
- Avoid overstating the importance of your findings. Be modest rather than expansive.
- At the end of the Discussion, make a final summary statement of the conclusions you have drawn. When appropriate, you might want to comment on the importance and relevance of your findings. How are your findings related to the big picture?

Component 7: References

- Start a new page and center the word “References” at the top.
- Use APA guidelines for documenting sources.
- The references listed in the Reference section must match those used in the body of the report.
- Only list references that you read in entirety. For example, if you read about Study X in Study Y’s report, you should only include Study Y in the reference Section. Study X should be cited (using secondary source citation format) in the lit review.

Component 8: Appendices

- This section is where you may place any additional information such as statistical calculations or copies of materials like word lists or surveys. Everything in the appendix must be referred to somewhere in the body of the report.

Tips to Remember When Writing for Psychology:

- Try to be as unbiased as possible.
- Use past tense (because you should have already completed the study).
- Avoid passive voice. Always use active voice.

Don't write: "It was found that..."

Write: "Smith (1993) found that..."

- Avoid wordiness. Say what you need to say as concisely as possible.

Don't write: "In his study, which was performed in 1993, Smith was surprised to find that..."

Write: "Smith (1993) found that..."

- Do not use slang.
- Avoid excessive use of the terms "I", "me", and "my" as well phrases like "I feel" or "I think".
- Use transition sentences, especially in your Lit Review.
- And finally, it is always helpful to read your paper out loud.