



F NO. 1 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

Biology Lab Reports

A lab report is a very structured type of writing, and it is important to put the right things in the right places. Here are some guidelines as to what goes where.

1. Abstract
 - Is brief (fewer than 250 words).
 - Includes 1-2 sentences each of summary for introduction, methods, results, and conclusion.
 - Is easiest to write last, once you know what every other section discusses.
2. Introduction
 - Provides all the context a reader needs to be able to understand and interpret the results.
 - Discusses current understanding of topic with relevant studies in a “funnel shape,” beginning broadly and narrowing down to the exact inquiry.
 - Describes what will be done in this study including objectives and hypothesis.
3. Methods and Materials
 - Is written in past tense; many professors are moving away from passive voice, but the custom is still discipline-specific, so ask the instructor to be sure.
 - Describes everything about how the experiment was performed (What? Where? When? How?).
 - Includes relevant info, such as materials used, organism (with the Latin name listed in italics afterward), and methods of data analysis.
Note: If the procedure used is well-known or published, you may reference it rather than rewrite it.
4. Results
 - Describes analyzed data, not raw data; for example, average length instead of individual length.
 - Guides the reader through--and refers to--all tables or figures.
 - Points out trends in data and comparisons between data, including the direction of difference (such as which variable was larger), not just that there was a difference between variables.
5. Discussion
 - Conceptually links to the introduction with a brief recap at beginning of section, specifically through discussion of data in terms of objectives and hypothesis and comparison of this study’s conclusions with those of others.
 - Addresses any issues with experimental design or data collection that may have influenced results.
 - Presents an interpretation of the larger meaning of this work.
6. Literature Cited
 - Uses a different format with each journal. Check with your instructor for specific format.
 - No matter the requested format, *must* be consistent.

(continued on reverse)

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Biology Lab Reports, Continued

7. Tables and Figures

- Need descriptive captions; figure legends go below figures and table legends go above tables.
- Are not be raw data.
- Are understandable without reading the entire report/manuscript.
- Should be referred to sequentially in the text, excluding none.

For more information on writing lab reports, see:

The St. Martin's Handbook (7th ed): 36, 854-72

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/sciences.html>

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