

The Discussion Section

General Structure

1. First paragraph briefly summarizes key questions and findings
2. Subsequent paragraphs to address each key study question
 - a. Key results
 - b. How these compare to the literature
 - c. Synthesize current data with the literature, provide interpretation
3. Any key nuances
4. Limitations
 - a. Listing these does not negate concerns related to them
 - b. For each, authors should explain why they do not jeopardize the conclusions
5. Conclusion

Pitfalls

1. Avoid discussion about the general topic that is not relevant to the study data
2. Although there is often some redundancy between the introduction and the discussion, try to minimize. Literature presented in the introduction is meant to justify the study purpose and design, while literature presented in the discussion is meant to contextualize the data found.
3. Avoid simply listing data from the study itself and other studies. Interpretation is a key function of the discussion section.
4. That said, be careful not to overreach in terms of interpretation. Generally one can only make recommendations based on the key study questions, while other findings may simply prompt additional study.
5. Be cautious about over-emphasizing negative results which may be underpowered

Tips

1. Generally, the discussion should focus on the study findings. However, in some circumstances authors have specific knowledge on the topic that readers are curious about and adding their thoughts (i.e. level 5 evidence) is helpful.
2. Whenever possible, explain how the study data in the context of the literature changes practice
3. When appropriate, propose solutions based on study data and literature