Scientific Writing – Results & Discussion

What is the difference between the Results and Discussion sections of a scientific paper? The Results section simply presents what you found in your investigation of a problem. The Discussion section details what those findings mean, interpreting and evaluating the findings in terms of your original problem.

Tips for writing the Results Section

- Report key findings without interpretation in logical sequence
- Use factual statements supported by evidence
- Text & illustrative materials can bring attention to important data and findings
- Present representative data
- Use meaningful statistics
- Avoid redundancy

Tips for writing the Discussion Section

- Start with the big picture – WHY is your study important?
- Critically analyze your major findings
  - What did you find?
  - How do these findings relate to your hypothesis?
  - Explain any unexpected results
- Other findings and links to literature
- Acknowledge the study’s limitations
- Make suggestions for future directions
- Do not restate or introduce new findings
Rhetorical outlining is useful for better understanding what each section of a paper says and does. Use the questions below to help evaluate the communicative purpose of a paper’s Results and Discussion sections.

For the Results section of a paper, consider:

- In what sequence do they report results, and why?
- How do they present information?
- What information do they choose to present as text? As a table or graphic? Why?
- What statistics do they use and why?
- What did they leave out?

For the Discussion section of a paper, consider:

- Did they reintroduce the big picture of the study?
- How do they present major findings?
- Do they link findings to their initial hypotheses and/or to literature?
- How do they discuss limitations?
- How do they discuss future directions?
- What did they leave out?