Writing a Discussion

SHSS5069 - Research in Health and Physical Activity

Health, Nutrition and Lifestyle Group

Alison Connaughton

What is the Purpose of the Discussion Section?

- Explain your results and place them into context.
- Most important section of the dissertation.
- Why?
- Section most likely to be cited or quoted.
- Demonstrates understanding, interpretation analysis skills.

Discussion

Specific



General

Important Components of the Discussion Section

1. Introduction of key findings from your results.
2. Relating your results to previous research (and theory).
3. Suggest reasons for your findings.
4. Strengths and limitations of your study.
5. Practical implications.
6. Directions for future research.

Introduction of Key Findings From Your Results.

- The first sentence in the discussion should briefly describe the most important result you obtained.
- What were your key findings?
- Relate back to your aims… State the conclusion(s) in clear, precise, unambiguous language.
- Remember you have not 'proved' anything, you merely support or reject previous research
- If you proposed hypotheses – you can support or reject these.
- You do not HAVE to have hypotheses.
- The first section is a direct interpretation of your statistical test results or qualitative analysis, however do not simply re-state what you have said in the results section.
- Significance values (quantitative research) should be included ($P<0.05$ or $P<0.01$).

Relating Your Results to Previous Research.

- The reader should be able to go directly to the discussion section and establish the key findings from the first paragraph.
- Relate back to previous work that you have discussed.
- The main emphasis in this section should lie in relating your results to previous work in the area and in discussing the theoretical implications.
- Start with most specific / relevant research.
- Similar study / using the same methods / same population…if possible
- Do your results support or reject previous studies?
- Similarities / differences?

Relating to Previous Theory / Models Proposed to Explain Behaviour

- You will normally have theoretical positions outlined in your literature review.
- Relate back to these key theories mentioned in the literature review – does your research support or reject these?
- What changes / additions would you suggest need to be made to theories in light of what you have found – this may not be the case!
- Move to less specific research studies (still relevant though!) – different population / country / method.

Suggest Reasons for Your Findings.

- General rule - you should not be referring to research that you have not previously reviewed (introduction / review / rationale section).
- If it was not worthy of appearing in your literature review – why include it now?
- If it is important now it needs to go in the literature review – add it in somewhere!
- Try not to make broad generalisations in your writing, you may only suggest reasons for your findings, not categorically state something caused them.

Strengths and Limitations of Your Study.

- You may also wish to discuss your study in broader terms; say why you may not have got the results/effect you anticipated i.e. sample size too small, not enough control of extraneous variables or inappropriate measures of performance.
- What strengths did your study have?
  - Has this ever been done before?
  - In this way? - Type of methods used
  - Sample of participants
- What weaknesses did your study have?
  - Time limitations – what impact did this have
  - Sample of participants – size etc…

Practical Implications.

- Finally, you may wish to suggest the implications of the results for practical situations.
- If you have established:
  - Barriers to exercising for a population
  - Motives for exercising for a previously neglected population
  - Effects of an intervention programme
- Who is this information going to be useful for?
- How could this information be used by these people?
- You are again providing reasons why your study was worthwhile.

Directions for Future Research.

- Suggest avenues of future research in the field.
- From conducting your research you may be aware early on of how the study could be improved.
- Different methods:
  - Qualitative / quantitative
  - Longitudinal study
  - Triangulation of methods
  - Alternative questionnaire
- Different sample:
  - Expand to further populations

Task 1:

Read a journal article of your choice…

- Identify the key focus of the introduction
- Identify the key focus of the discussion

Where the author has used the same reference in each section…

- Identify how this has been used in the introduction.
- Identify how this has been used in the discussion

Task 2:

- Highlight the key focus of each paragraph in the discussion.
- Use key words / simple sentence (your own words).

General Presentation Rules…

- Write in the third person only throughout your discussion.
  - The results of the current study support the work of Davies (2004) by suggesting that…..
- Past tense.
- Discussion becomes more speculative towards the end.
  - Suggesting reasons for findings
  - Practical application.
- Suggest ideas for future research to test this speculation.

Summary

- Structure of the discussion section:
  - Introduction of key findings from your results.
  - Relating your results to previous research.
  - Suggest reasons for your findings.
  - Strengths and limitations of your study.
  - Practical implications.
  - Directions for future research.