Discussion Sections

PIH Cross-site COVID-19 Writing Workshop

- You have your data, you've (factually) stated your results…

So what?

And what now?

What is the role of the discussion section?

1. **What is your interpretation of the results?**
   - What were the major things you observed and why do you think these were observed?

2. **What is the context of your results?**
   - Are there other studies/other factors that need to be considered?

3. **What are the implications of your results?**
   - What should change/stay the same based on your study?

Steps for writing a discussion

Results ➤ Discussion Points ➤ Discussion Paragraphs

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What goes into a discussion section?

1. Major findings along with
    - Suggestions of why these were observed
    - Other possible explanations for the results

2. Relation of these results to other studies

3. Study limitations and impact on interpretation

4. Major recommendations based on study

5. Any recommendations for future research

6. The main message that you want readers to leave with ("conclusion")

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Tips for writing a discussion section

- Be brief and specific

- Discuss as much as important (but be careful not to discuss too much that key points are lost)

- Make sure your major hypotheses (from introduction) are discussed

- **<u>Make sure statements are supported by the results</u>**

- Be critical of your methods

Tips for writing a discussion section

- Discuss all results that are important, whether or not statistically significant

- Discuss points of view that might be different from your own

- Discuss unexpected findings

- Make sure the readers walk away knowing the value of the study and study recommendations

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Careful referencing

- In the discussion, it is important to link what you have observed and what you think is happening to other papers.

- However, be careful to reference correctly

Reference example

- From our study, we believe that having no surgeon/infrastructure at Kirehe and Rwinkwavu DHs may mean patients who need laparotomy don't get it.
- Kruk et al (2010) state limited equipment/surgical specialist mean that people who need surgery might not get it.

- "Limited equipment and lack of surgical specialist at Kirehe and Rwinkwavu might lead to lack of laparotomy for patients who need it (Kruk 2010)."
- "Limited equipment and surgical staff are noted barriers for receiving surgery in SSA (Kruk 2010)"

What to avoid in writing the discussion

- Don't just repeat the results section

- Don't discuss things that aren't relevant

- Don't overstate the importance and don't "preach"

- Don't state things that aren't justified or supported by the data
  - If you have a reason that you think explains the results, then that reason should be justified beyond what you "think"

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What else?

- Limitations:
  - No study is perfect. What are some of the biggest limitations of your <u>research</u>?
    - How does this effect your results/interpretation?
    - What is being done to improve these limitations? Or why do you think that these limitations are not a big problem?
    - Be fair, but don't go overboard.

- Concluding paragraph:
  - Your take-home catch.
    - Major lessons
    - Major steps forward

How to begin:

1. Take a step back – what are your 3-4 big picture points you want to make to your readers.
   - Spend about 10-15 minutes discussing before you start writing anything down.

2. Then, for each point start elaborating (sub-bullets):
   - Does this connect to other studies (similar, refute)? Are there explanations for what you see (references, or *limitedly,* "in our experience")? Anything surprising? Anything uncertain?
   - Put references as you go (Last Name, YYYY) or a place holder (ref)
   - Anticipate spending 20-40 minutes per paragraph.

3. Start drafting paragraphs. *This is not easy, and will take several rounds* ☺.

4. May be easiest to do first paragraph "In this study, we found...", limitations paragraph, and conclusion at the very end.

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Questions?