The “Discussion” section allows you to delve into the findings of your research and explore how they can be applied to more general populations. This is where you draw inferences and come up with conclusions from the data. It’s also where you explain the significance of your work. This handout will help you create a thorough “Discussion” section that highlights and explains the most important findings of your research.

### Purpose

Your “Discussion” or “Conclusion” section is the opportunity to explain what your results mean and to place this information into context for your reader. This section has the opposite shape of your introduction: it moves from specific (the conclusions from your data) to general (how your conclusions fit into current knowledge).

This section also includes the importance or significance of your study. In other words, it includes the consequences of your work and how it fits into the broad literature in the field.

*Note:* For practice drafting a conclusion, please see the worksheet at the end of this handout.

### Elements

**Introduction and Summary of the Study**

Briefly restate the purpose of the study and preview the structure of this section. This section should be short: get to your principal findings quickly.

**Discussion of the Findings**

Your findings are the answer to your research question and are likely to be what most interests your readers. Interpret your results for the readers—show them what you think the results *mean*. Make sure that any claims that you make are supported by your data.

Follow the organization you have established in previous sections. For example, if your “Materials and Methods” and “Results” sections were grouped around specific variables, organize your “Discussion” section accordingly. You can use subheadings to do so.

*Note:* For more information on how to write a “Materials and Methods” or a “Results” section, please see our handouts on these topics.

**Comparisons and Contrasts to Other Studies**

As part of your discussion, you will also want to explain how your findings relate to those of previous...
studies. This is also a way to connect back to your “Literature Review” section and situate your study in the context you created there.

*Note:* For more information on how to write a “Literature Review” section, please see our handout on this topic.

**Unexpected Findings**

If your study yielded unexpected results or results that don’t match the current literature, be sure to report them. As best as you can, determine if the unusual findings were the result of some error in your methodology. Even if you don’t understand the mechanism, include the findings: future research might be able to explain what happened.

**Hypotheses or Models**

Depending on your type of research, you may need to propose a larger explanation for your findings, such as a new theory or model. When doing so, refer to your data to ensure that you aren’t making unwarranted generalizations. Explain how your proving or refuting your hypothesis supports your explanations.

Present alternative explanations for your findings. You might also include possibilities in which your data might not support your hypothesis.

**Limitations and Validity**

If there are any limitations or biases which would prevent the generalization or certainty of your findings, be sure to discuss them. This section also allows you to discuss ways that your study could have been better implemented. Present ideas of solutions for the limitations of your study which could be implemented in further research.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This section discusses what you would explore further if you wanted to expand on your research question(s). These recommendations might include new questions opened up by your research, the next experiments in the logical chain, or experiments to follow up on the limitations in your study.

**Implications**

Describe how the results of your research can be applied in the practice of your field. Often these implications take the form of personal insights or suggestions.

**Conclusions**

The conclusion of your “Discussion” section is an opportunity for you to demonstrate that you have fulfilled your purpose and answered your questions and to make final assertions based on your data. This is the “take-home” message of your research for your audience.

**References**


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Writing Center
SMC Campus Center
621 W. Lombard St. Room 307
www.umaryland.edu/writing
410-706-7725
University Press.

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### Conclusion

**Specific / Known**

**Conclusion**

**General**

**Unknown**

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**Conclusion**

So what? Why is my claim significant?

- ____________________________________________________________
- ____________________________________________________________
- ____________________________________________________________

What now? What further action does my claim suggest? ______________________________________________________________________

What are the limitations of my claim? ____________________________________________

What aspects of my issue need further research? ____________________________________

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**Specific / Known**

**General**

**Unknown**

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