

# Paper Writing in Practice

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## Tips for writing the discussion

### The Discussion

- should place the results into context of the broader literature, with respect to:
  - how they are consistent with them, *and*
  - how they differ from them
- should reference papers:
  - from competitors
  - that come to conclusions different from yours, and
  - that were published in the course of carrying out the work.
- should answer the major question raised in the introduction
- should acknowledge the limitations of the study/any open questions
- should highlight the significance/impact of the work (not merely rehash other sections), i.e. indicate where it is expected to lead the field
- should end on the positives!
- the editor will look here for arguments in support of the novelty and significance of the findings
  
- Speculation within the discussion:
  - a chance to say what you think vs what you know
  - should always be clearly distinguished from established facts (don't muddle the field)
  - a moderate level may make the discussion more interesting,  
...but remember that the line between moderate and excessive may become a matter of contention
  - rule of thumb: one layer of speculation only
  - the editor will ask him/herself if this is reasonable and interesting or unfounded
  
- Be sure to clearly spell out your interpretations/conclusions – leaving the reader mid-thought may leave him/her:
  - wondering which of two interpretations is meant
  - completely in the dark, especially if unfamiliar with the topic
  
- Strategies:
  - use subtitles if it makes the discussion more interesting/easier to follow
  - recommended (but not required) order of discussion:
    - start with brief summary of major finding(s) – i.e., answer to major question raised in introduction
    - then continue with fit with literature and implications where the fit is not good (usually the main point of interest of the paper)
    - end with summary of how your findings change, or will potentially change, the field (and other speculation)