The Sections of an Empirical Research Paper

- Title Page
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Methods*
  - Procedures
  - Subjects
  - Stimuli
  - Apparatus
- Results
- Discussion
- References
- Tables and Figures

*It is extremely important that everything goes in the correct place. Thus, Apparatus (equipment, tests, lab or room etc) should not refer to Procedures (instructions, flash duration, experimental design, time of day, etc) and vice-versa. Similarly, the Results section should contain just factual result reporting (in the past tense) including statistical tests but no discussion.

Explanation of each Section of a Research Paper

**Title:** This should be as short as possible but should also give a clear indication of the paper’s content. Your title page must conform to APA style guidelines.

**Abstract:** No longer than 100-200 words. Your abstract should factually describe the purpose, techniques, results and implications of your study but not details of your methods. It should grab attention and create a desire to read on. **Write it last,** when you know what’s in the paper.

**Introduction:** Places the study in the context of previous research but tells only what the reader needs to know to understand the present work. Either avoid jargon or explain it very clearly. In this section you should include your original observation and your hypothesis.

**Methods:** The first paragraph of the Introduction is the hardest part of a paper to write. This section is the easiest to write and can be started even before the research is finished. So start there. You will describe how you set up and ran your experiment. Give your operational definitions, procedures, sample size, etc. It must be specific enough to permit replication. Where necessary, justify choices made (of variables, techniques etc).

**Results:** The results - writing, statistics and graphs - should be presented as simply as possible. Try to make figure legends self contained so that reference to the text is unnecessary. Do not present irrelevant data to which the Discussion will not refer. Use the past tense: “Regression analysis indicated …”

**Discussion:** When most people read a paper, they read the Abstract first, then the Introduction, some graphs or tables and then the Discussion. Therefore, the Discussion should begin by summarizing the main findings. Then interpret the findings in relation to the Introduction and finally draw conclusions. Keep the discussion to the results, i.e. do not go beyond the data. Use the present tense: “One possible explanation is …..”

**References:** Make sure that you use APA style. Cite any studies you referred to or other materials that developed your understanding of the subject or background.

**Figure Legends:** Make these as clear as possible, ensuring that there are no aspects of the figure which are not explained either in the legend or the figure itself.

**Tables and Figures:** Make sure your data tables are clearly titled are referred to in the discussion. Make them easy to read and avoid cluttering them together on a single page.