

# Academic Writing Skills Session Psychology & Counselling

## What will you be writing?

- Essays
- Laboratory Reports
- Research Proposals
- Ethics Applications
- Presentations
- Reflective Journals

## What makes an essay?

- Essays will generally be assigned for you to answer a specific question.
- Essays should include an introduction, a body and a conclusion.
- A good essay will introduce all sides of an issue but make a clear argument about the issue.
- Answer the question!

### Essay outline

#### Introduction

### Paragraphs

Orientate the reader  
Identify the focus/purpose  
Outline scope  
State **thesis**

#### Body

**Topic sentence 1**  
Supporting details  
Concluding sentence 1

Topic sentence 2  
Supporting details  
Concluding sentence 2

Topic sentence 3 and so on  
Supporting details  
Concluding sentence 3

#### Conclusion

Restate thesis  
Summarise argument

## Introduction

- General ideas about the topic to interest the reader
- Background information
- **Thesis statement** or argument
- Outline of main points

## Body

- A. Main point 1
  - Topic sentence
  - Supporting details
  - Link to thesis
- B. Main point 2
  - Topic sentence
  - Supporting details
  - Link to thesis
- C. Main point 3
  - Topic sentence
  - Supporting details
  - Link to thesis

## Conclusion

- Summary of the arguments and main points
- Restatement of the thesis
- The importance of the argument

Reference: [http://sun4a.vaniercollege.qc.ca/mathsci/AWS\\_winter\\_06/hourglass.png](http://sun4a.vaniercollege.qc.ca/mathsci/AWS_winter_06/hourglass.png)

## What is a laboratory report?

- A laboratory report is a way of describing research in a standardised format.
- A lab report will include the following:
  - An abstract
  - An introduction to the research topic
  - An explanation of how the research was conducted: a methods section
  - The results of the research
  - A discussion of the results
  - References

## The Abstract

- A brief (<120 words) summary of the study.
- Allows readers to quickly survey contents and results of report.
- Appears alone on second page.
- Only part of report that is single-spaced.

## The Introduction

- Presents the theoretical background to your study
- Presents the purpose of your study
- Should answer these questions:
  - What is the reason for doing the study?
  - How does this study relate to other research?
  - What is the hypothesis you are testing – what did you expect to find and why?
    - Should be ‘funnel-shaped’
    - Should outline the LOGICAL connection between previous research and your study.

## Methods Section

- Describes in detail how the study was conducted

Includes labelled subsections:

- *Participants* – describes your participants in detail.
- *Apparatus or materials* – describes the equipment you used (including measures).
- *Procedure* – describes exactly how you did the study

## Results

- Describes data and statistical treatment of data
- **Never** include individual scores (unless it is a case study)
- Report descriptive statistics: measures of central tendency and variability, results of statistical tests etc.
- Most results will be reported in text
- Can use tables or figures to illustrate results
- Follow APA guidelines for tables and figures
- Aim for simplicity
- Do not DISCUSS the results – just DESCRIBE them.

## Discussion

- The section where you evaluate and interpret your results

Should answer these questions:

- Was the hypothesis supported or not?
- Did your study have results that were consistent or not consistent with previous research?
- What has your study contributed to the field of research?
- What are your conclusions about your results (what does it all mean)?
- What are the implications of your findings for future research, for applied situations?
- Were there any limitations to your study?
- If so, how might they have affected the results?
  - Includes a paragraph summarising the findings (last part of the discussion)

## References

- An accurate and inclusive list of all sources of information for your report
- Not a bibliography – must *only* contain sources you cited in text
- Any sources cited *must* be in the reference list
- Alphabetical order
- Hanging indent
- Very specific rules for citing sources in text and for the reference list – CHECK APA MANUAL

## Referencing (APA)

Voldemort (1999) argues that children reading books about witchcraft has no effect on their imagination. However, other authors (Dumbledore, Weasley & Black, 2000) do not agree with this claim and argue that Voldemort is not measuring imagination correctly, and thus, can make no claims about the effects of reading about witchcraft on children's imaginations. Dumbledore et al. claim that Voldemort has ignored the major component of imagination, which in their consideration, is visual imagery.

## Referencing (APA)

### References

- Anthem, N. R. (2003). *Singing in tune (3rd ed.)*. Brisbane, Australia: Wadsworth.
- Boatman, F., & Rower, T.J. (1980). Putting in the effort: A study of oarsmanship. *Journal of Huffing and Puffing*, 33 (4), 234 – 235.
- Carlson, N. R., Martin, G. N., & Buskist, W. (2004). *Psychology (2nd European ed.)*. Essex, England: Pearson.

## Some Points on Style

- Write in past tense for everything that has happened in the past (other studies, data collection etc).
- Use present tense for parts of your discussion that are in the present – “*the figure illustrates*”, “*the results suggest that*”.
- Write in complete sentences – all sentences have a subject, verb and object.
  - “*Bloggs (1990) argued that men and women are different.*” – this is a complete sentence.
  - “*Thus, indicating a difference of opinion.*” – this is not; it does not have a subject or object.

## Some Points on Style

- Pay attention to punctuation – there are rules for the use of commas, colons and apostrophes.
- Do not use contractions (notice I did not put “*don’t*”).
- Pay attention to spelling.
- Do not use direct quotes extensively – it is better to explain someone’s findings in your own words and reference them appropriately.
- Always write in third person narrative.

## The fine print.

- Plagiarism
- SafeAssignment
- Referencing
- Using legitimate scientific sources
  - Include only appropriate sources – do not PAD your reference section
  - Use refereed publications (not pop-psychology, magazine articles etc)

## Where to get help.

- The APA Manual
- Your lecturers/tutors.
- Your Student Mentor.
- The library.
- Study skills online.
- Your peers.