



## Tips and pointers to writing a good discussion chapter

**Writing a discussion chapter can be challenging. Suddenly you are done presenting your findings and results. What do you do now? There is no magic formula for writing a good discussion chapter. But here follow some tips I have collected for you to consider. These tips mainly focus on issues I regularly see my students struggle with.**

### **Under construction**

Your discussion chapter should demonstrate a clear transition from facts, results, findings and empirical data -in your findings/results chapter -to your own interpretations, hypotheses and recommendations based on those data. The discussion chapter is where you need to reflect on and interpret what you found in your research, and tell the world why your results can be important to them. You can experience the discussion chapter difficult to write, and there are no templates for how to write one. But the main difficulty might be that you feel it is scary to claim that you -as an inexperienced researcher -have created any useful knowledge at all. You might think that important results is something that only experienced researchers with a lot of publications can claim to have. This fear of claiming you have something new, useful and important to tell is something you need to get rid of before starting to write your discussion chapter! When you have done it, here are some tips but you need to adapt them to your own style of writing:

- One important thing that many students forget is revisiting the research questions. You do your research in order to answer a set of research questions that will help you achieve a goal/solve a problem. Your research design and data collection need to be guided by your research questions. You need to show this also -and in particular -in your discussion chapter, i.e. how you addressed those questions through your research, and how your answers help solve the problem/achieve the goal or objective of your research. A good place to start a discussion chapter is therefore by starting a section called "Addressing the research questions".
- Your discussion of how you answered your research questions needs to be directly based on data from your finding/results chapter. You do not need to repeat all the findings, but you have to base your arguments and hypotheses on your own generated data and refer back when unclear (this means you should not conclude without data to support your conclusion). A common risk is that you have the line of argument in your head but you don't make it visible to the reader. Think this way: "As we saw in our findings.... A possible interpretation of these finds is that .... This would then

imply....". If you think the connection back to your findings can be difficult for the reader to see, spell it out!

- Avoid introducing new theories and new references in the discussion chapter. If you are using any theories or comparing to other research, these need to be introduced already in chapters "Theoretical background" or "Related work" through proper references. Try to refer back to what you said in those chapters, but avoid introducing new theories in the discussion chapter. You might though mention alternative theories that you now -as an afterthought -think can explain your results better. These alternative theories can be mentioned in the future research section.
- You need to be very specific when describing your contribution (can possibly go into conclusions). What is the new knowledge you brought to the world? To what part of the earlier research did you contribute, and how? What does your contribution mean to earlier related research? Does it support it, invalidate it, broaden it? Were your findings expected? Unexpected? Why?
- After you have written about what your findings mean for your specific care/study, you should, towards the end of the chapter, discuss what the findings mean in a broader context. What does your specific case and findings mean for other similar problems and domains? What does it mean for other application areas? What does it mean for practitioners?
- You can conclude your discussion chapter with sections on "Limitations of the research" and "Future research". These two sections are different but partly overlapping. It is often difficult for students to see what goes where. A rule of thumb is that future research should not mention things you would do to fix defects in the research you did. For instance, if you had too little data in a way that it threatens the validity of your results, this needs to go into limitations of research. If you want to have a different type of data in order to generalize your results, this can go into future work.
- Advanced tip: Overall you need to frame your discussion based on the discussion you had in your introduction and related/theoretical work. Your discussion should follow the same "conceptual framework" and "framing" as the one you started your paper with.

#### Other resources

- [This blog from The Thesis Whisperer](#) outlines a visual process for sketching a discussions chapter.
  - More coming.
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