

MRC Ecological Risk Assessment Training Program

Report Writing

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Overall Objective

- To present the essential elements in preparing a good scientific report
- To provide practice at writing reports for the ERA Training Program

Research

No matter how good or important the results are, it is not complete until written up and published

Scientific writing

- Four questions
 - What was the problem studied?
 - How did I study it?
 - What did I find?
 - What do these findings mean?
- The answers become
 - Introduction
 - Methods
 - Results
 - Discussion

Title/Authors

- **Title**
 - Needs to be a label not a sentence
 - Avoid 'wasted words' (e.g. 'Studies on ...', 'Investigations of')
- **Authors**
 - Include those who have actively contributed
 - Authors take intellectual responsibility for research results

Abstract

- Very important - often the only part read
- Needs to be short (150-200 words)
- Is a summary of the information:
 - States the principal objectives and scope of the study
 - Describes methods used
 - Summarises the results
 - States the principal conclusions
- Should be stand-alone, don't need to go to the article
- Often too much detail presented
- Avoid references

Introduction

- Contains a description of what you did
- Goes from general to specific
- Contains nature and scope of the problem
- Indicates how this study fits with the problem
- Reviews the pertinent literature
- Finally presents the aims and objectives of the study and/or report

Materials & Methods

- Contains a description of how you did it
- Put different parts of the study under separate sub-headings
- Examples

Results

- Contains a description of what you found in your experiments
- Should present only fact (not interpretation)
- Present results in logical sequence that corresponds to objectives
- Best if short
- Make sure Tables and Figures are clear and understandable
- Do not include material that does not relate to the objectives

Discussion

- Contains a description of what your results mean
- Shows the relationships between results observed
- Shows how the results agree or disagree with the previously published literature
- Often useful to start with a set of dot points, then use these to start the paragraph

Conclusions

- Most often quoted part of the paper
- State conclusions summarising the evidence
- Add ideas for future research and questions not answered by this work

References

- Try to restrict to journal articles not reports (latter too difficult to find)
- Use format specific for the journal
- Check citations and text
- Avoid errors in citations, reference not in text('Ghosts')