



NO. 14 IN THE WRITING CENTER HANDOUT SERIES

Biology Lab Reports

A lab report is a very structured type of writing, and it is important to put the right things in the right places. Here are some guidelines as to what goes where.

1. Abstract
 - Is brief (fewer than 250 words).
 - Includes background information, the procedure, key results and general conclusions.
2. Introduction
 - Discusses why this topic is being studied.
 - Discusses current understanding of topic with relevant studies.
 - Describes what will be done in this study including objectives and hypothesis.
3. Methods and Materials
 - Is written in past tense using passive voice.
 - Describes everything about how the experiment was performed (What? Where? When? How?).
 - Includes relevant info, such as materials used, organism, and methods of data analysis.
 - Note: If the procedure used is well-known or published, you may reference it rather than rewrite it.
4. Results
 - Describes data. Presents analyzed data, not raw data.
 - Example:* Average length, not each individual length.
 - Should guide the reader through all tables or figures.
 - Points out trends in data and comparisons between data.
5. Discussion
 - Conceptually links to the introduction, specifically through discussion of data in terms of objectives and hypothesis and comparison of this study's conclusions with those of others.
 - Mentions any errors or problems with procedure and how they affect the data.
 - Discusses unexpected results.
 - Presents an interpretation of the larger meaning of this work.
6. Literature Cited
 - Uses a different format with each journal. Check with your instructor for specific format.
7. Tables and Figures
 - Need descriptive captions.
 - Should not be raw data.
 - Should have a meaning of their own
 - Should be referred to sequentially in the text, excluding none.

For more information on writing lab reports, see

The New St. Martin's Handbook (5th edition): 921-937

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/sciences.html>