Waynesburg University Writing Center: Lab Reports

TITLE PAGE
In this order: descriptive title, writer's name, course number, lab partner(s), date experiment/analysis was performed, professor's name

ABSTRACT (< 5% of report)
This serves as a sort of summary of the entire report—it basically provides the reader with enough information to decide if the paper is worth reading or not. Each of the other sections in the report should be summarized in 1-2 sentences and combined into a paragraph of no more than ≈200 words.

INTRODUCTION (20% of report)
This section gives the reader background information about the report's topic (e.g., experimental organisms(s), analytical/experimental technique(s), etc.). It serves to ensure that the reader won't wonder "wait—what is ______?" halfway through the materials and methods section.

In addition, one of the last sentences of this section should state an explicit hypothesis about the results of the experiment/analysis.

MATERIALS & METHODS (10-15% of report)
This section should be brief (yet specific). It allows the writer to tell the reader what he did in the experiment/analysis so that he can prove that his results and conclusion(s) are reasonably-obtained.

RESULTS (15-20% of report)
This section should contain data, observations, and figures/charts that summarize it all. All charts and figures should be appropriately labeled, explained, and specifically referenced in the text portion of the results. Interpretation of results DOES NOT belong here!!!

DISCUSSION (20-35% of report)
This is the most important section of the entire report. Results of the experiment should be examined and interpreted in the context of the information provided in the introduction, the experimental/analytical methods used in the project, and the "real world."

A specific statement about whether or not the hypothesis was correct should be included toward the beginning of this section (preferably toward the beginning of the section). Any unexpected results should also be discussed and interpreted.

This section should also identify any sources of error and explain how they may be improved.

REFERENCES (< 5% of report)
Students should have a guide to in-text citations and bibliography format. If they don't, guidelines can be found in Writing Papers in the Biological Sciences by V. McMillan or somewhere on the web.

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