**A quick guide to writing a psychological practical**

**An overview of the various sections of a report**

The report is divided into sections, each of which provides a specific type of information. Here, we provide a short description of what should be contained in each section, However a reader would expect to find all of these sections in the report, in this particular order:

1. Title.
2. Abstract.
3. Introduction.
4. Method (sub-divided into the following sections:)
   * 1. Design
     2. Null hypothesis
     3. Experimental hypotheis
     4. Dependent variables
     5. Independent variables
     6. Subject
     7. Apparatus and Materials
     8. Procedure
5. Results
6. Discussion
7. References.
8. Appendices (Not always present).

**These sections answer four basic questions:**

1. "**Why?"** Why did I do this particular experiment? What did I expect to find out by doing it? This question is dealt with in the Introduction.
2. **"How?"** How did I actually carry it out - what procedures and apparatus did I use? this question is covered in the Method section.
3. "**What?".** What did I find? What were my results? This information is provided in the results section.
4. **"So What?"** What does it all mean? How do my results relate to previous research on the same topic, and what are their theoretical implications? What are my conclusions? These issues are all dealt with in the Discussion section.

What about all the other bits - the Title, Abstract and References? These have important functions too. The Title enables the reader to get a very quick idea of what the report is about. If they are still interested, they can read the Abstract, which is a summary that provides a brief outline of the main procedures, results and findings of the study. The Reference section allows the reader to obtain further information on the topic of the report, by providing full details of any previous work that the author has referred to. (It also enables the reader to check that the author hasn't misquoted or misrepresented the work of others in the course of citing them!).

**Title:**

Provide a succinct title of no more than about 15 words. If it were the title of a journal article, It would be informative enough to enable the reader to identify the paper from the journal's index as something that they would be interested in reading: e.g. " An experiment on problem solving ".

**Abstract:**

This is a brief summary (150 words maximum) of the report. It gives the reader a quick idea of what you did, the main results, and their theoretical implications. It's easiest to write this last, once you have written the rest of the report.

**Introduction:**

This part of the report introduces the reader to the topic on which you are going to do your experiment, and provides a justification for *why* you did the experiment. You provide some background information about previous research in this area, and explain why your study was worth doing - how is it likely to add to our knowledge of this topic? Your experiment might aim to plug a gap in our knowledge, or clarify some issue which has arisen from previous research - perhaps previous experiments have produced inconsistent or conflicting results, or perhaps experiments have been done in two separate areas but no-one has thought of linking them together before. Section which gives the full reference for each work mentioned in the text.

The final paragraph or so of the introduction should outline your proposed experiment, and

State (in an informal way) what you predict your results will be, given your knowledge of

Previous research in this area. Here's an abbreviated example of an introduction (in practice,

You might include more information on previous studies and theories):

**Method**

This tells the reader what you did in your experiment, in enough detail that they could

Replicate the study in all its important details. It breaks down into sub-sections.

**Design**

This gives details of the formal design of the experiment - such as whether it was an

Independent-measures design (in which each condition of the experiment is performed by a

Separate group of participants) or a repeated-measures design (in which all participants Perform all of the conditions of the experiment). It identifies the independent and dependent

Variables in the study. Remember, the independent variable is what you manipulate, in your

Role as experimenter, and the dependent variable is what you measure. Here's our "design"

Section:

**Participants/ subject:**

Give details of who took part in your experiment: provide details of their gender, age and any

Special characteristics of them that might be relevant to your particular experiment (e.g.*.* **Apparatus:**

"Apparatus" in this context means things like stopwatches, computers, questionnaires, etc.

**Procedure:**

Explain how you actually carried out the experiment in practice. Give details of exactly what was done to participants; what they had to do; the order in which tests were administered; and how long test sessions took.

**Results:**

This section falls into two parts, although they don't have sub-headings. First, give

descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviation for each group or condition. Follow these with inferential statistics - the results of statistical tests used to decide whether

Any differences between groups or conditions were "real" as opposed to merely due to

Chance.

**Discussion:**

Start by briefly restating the main results, in words. Say whether or not they support your experimental hypothesis (as stated at the beginning of the introduction).Then relate your

Findings to those of previous studies: do your results support previous work, refute it, or

Force a re-evaluation of earlier findings? If your results are at variance with previous work,

Why do you think this has happened? What theoretical implications does this have? Basically, You are assessing your experiment's contribution to knowledge in this area of psychology. What faults or limitations did your study have? Do these seriously affect confidence in your findings? How might they be remedied in future work? Suggest possible worthwhile future experiments in this area. Finish by summarizing the main conclusions that can be drawn from your study.

**References:**

Here you provide, in alphabetical order and in a very standardized format, full details of every work that was cited in the body of the test.. Here are the references from our fictitious study: