

Experimental Psychology
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Helpful Hints for Writing Lab Reports

These hints were compiled from the mistakes of your peers. You should thank them for making these mistakes by making sure you avoid them in the future. Most of the issues below can be handled by a simple proof-reading of your paper. If possible, ask a friend or relative to read your paper and have them point out any time when they do not understand something. If they do not understand it, the chances are nobody else will either. If you cannot find someone else to read your paper, read it to yourself. Reading aloud is often a better way to catch errors.

Conjunctions

Always try to avoid conjunctions in formal writing. For example, you should choose to say *do not* instead of the conjunction *don't*. Obviously, conjunctions are necessary for indicating possession (e.g., *the experimenter's hypothesis*)

Word Agreement (plurality, verb tense, etc.)

Be careful to make sure that your sentence is internally consistent. As an example if you refer to multiple items or participants then the very and other related words must reflect this plurality (e.g., *There were 39 participants.* NOT *There was 39 participants.*).

Specificity / Clarity

Always make sure you have fully described any new concepts that you introduce. It is not enough to merely mention the concept without some explanation for how it is related in your paper. For example, it would be incorrect to say the following "*It appears as though activation monitoring theory is important to false memory.*" without explaining activation monitoring theory.

Understanding is Important

If you do not understand a concept, do not attempt to describe it in vague terms. Your best option is to ask your instructor for more information about the concept. You never want to appear as though you are talking about something you don't understand. It is better to simply omit the concept than it is to write it incorrectly.

Run On Sentences

As a rule of thumb, if your paragraph is only one sentence then you might have a run on sentence (or not enough information to justify its own paragraph). Do not try to fit too many separate clauses into a single sentence. Readability and comprehension will improve dramatically by breaking your run on sentence into two (or more) separate sentences.

APA Style

- Almost never do we include the year an article was cited in the sentence itself. Simply include the year in the citation, not the text of the sentence. For example, it is better to say "*according to Roediger and McDermott's (1995) results*" than it is to say "*according to Roediger and McDermott's 1995 results.*"
- Page numbers are only included in in-text citations when you are quoting directly.
- Avoid quotations. Remember, you are writing this paper, not your sources. It is almost always better to put it in your own words.
- Avoid mentioning article titles in your paper unless it is essential to your point.
- Methods: Include all *relevant* information. The key here is the word *relevant*. It is not important that your reader knows the study was conducted in the CASL building.

Minor Grammatical Issues

- *different...from*
- *affect* = verb vs. *effect* = noun (in most cases)
- *compared to* (similarity) vs. *compared with* (differences)
- *neither...nor* (You cannot use one of these words without also including the other)