DISCUSSING FINDINGS

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PROFESSEURE DES UNIVERSITÉS

INTRODUCTION

- Discussing results includes **two types of activity**:

a) considering both sides of an issue, or question before reaching a conclusion

b) considering the results of research and the implications of these.

"Many students reach this stage having been focused for several years on the 'trees'. The discussion provides an opportunity to revisit the 'forest'

Source: Brian Scholl, Yale Univ.

THE MOST IMPORTANT AND DIFFICULT SECTION OF YOUR RESEARCH

- Demonstrates your ability to think critically about an issue, to develop creative solutions to problems based upon a logical synthesis of the findings, and to formulate a deeper, more profound understanding of the research problem;
- Presents the underlying meaning of your research, notes possible implications in other areas of study, and explores possible improvements that can be made;
- Highlights the importance of your study and how it can contribute to understanding the research problem within the field of study;
- Presents how the findings revealed and helped fill gaps in the literature that had not been previously exposed or described;
- Engages the reader in thinking critically about issues based on an evidence-based interpretation of findings; it is not governed strictly by objective reporting of information.

PROVIDING BACKGROUND INFORMATION: REFERENCE TO THE LITERATURE

- Several reports have shown that …
  As mentioned in the literature review, …
  Prior studies that have noted the importance of …
  Very little was found in the literature on the question of …
  Previous studies evaluating X observed inconsistent results on whether …
  A strong relationship between X and Y has been reported in the literature.

PROVIDING BACKGROUND INFORMATION: REFERENCE TO THE QUESTION

- The first question in this research was …
  An initial objective of the project was to identify …
  The second question in this study sought to determine …
  It was hypothesized that …
  The present study was designed to determine the effect of …
  With respect to the first research question, it was found that …
  This study set out with the aim of assessing the importance of X in …

RESTATING THE RESULT OR ONE OF SEVERAL RESULTS

- One interesting finding is …
  The current study found that …
  Another important finding was that …
  The most interesting finding was that …
- This experiment did not detect any evidence for …
  The most important clinically relevant finding was …
  The most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis is that …
  In the current study, comparing X with Y showed that the mean degree of …
  The results of this study did not show that …/did not show any significant increase in …

INDICATING AN UNEXPECTED OUTCOME

- Surprisingly, X was found to ….
  What is surprising is that ….
  One unanticipated finding was that ….
  Surprisingly, no differences were found in ….
  This finding was unexpected and suggests that ….
  It is somewhat surprising that no X was noted in this condition ….
  Contrary to expectations, this study did not find a significant difference between ….
  However, the observed difference between X and Y in this study was not significant.
  However, the ANOVA (one way) showed that these results were not statistically significant.

COMPARING THE RESULT: SUPPORTING PREVIOUS FINDINGS

This finding is consistent with that of X(2000) who …
Comparison of the findings with those of other studies confirms …
This also accords with our earlier observations, which showed that …
These results corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work in …
Consistent with the literature, this research found that participants who reported using X also …
This study supports evidence from previous research (e.g. …)

COMPARING THE RESULT: CONTRADICTING PREVIOUS FINDINGS

- This study has been unable to demonstrate that …
  However, this result has not previously been described.
  This outcome is contrary to that of X et al. (2001) who found …
  This finding is contrary to previous studies which have suggested that …
  In contrast to earlier findings, however, no evidence of X was detected.
  However, the findings of the current study do not support the previous research.
  Smith et al. (1999) showed that … This differs from the findings presented here …
  It has been suggested that … (XY, 2002). This does not appear to be the case.

OFFERING AN EXPLANATION FOR THE FINDINGS

- A possible explanation for this might be that …
  Another possible explanation for this is that …
  This result may be explained by the fact that …
  There are, however, other possible explanations.
  These factors may explain the relatively good correlation between X and Y.
- This inconsistency may be due to …
  These results are likely to be related to …
  This discrepancy could be attributed to …
  It seems possible that these results are due to …
  This rather contradictory result may be due to …
  The observed increase in X could be attributed to …

ADVISING CAUTIOUS INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

- These results should be interpreted with caution…
- A source of uncertainty is …
  A note of caution is due here since …
  These findings may be somewhat limited by …
  These findings cannot be extrapolated to …
  These data must be interpreted with caution because …
  These results therefore need to be interpreted with caution.
  It is important to bear in mind the possible bias in these responses.

NOTING IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

- It can therefore be assumed that the …
  An implication of this is the possibility that …
  The present study raises the possibility that …
  One of the issues that emerges from these findings is …
  Some of the issues emerging from this finding relate to…
- These findings may help us to understand …
  This finding, while preliminary, suggests that ….
  This finding has important implications for developing …
  This observational study suggests that a diet rich in X may help prevent …
  These findings raise intriguing questions regarding the nature and extent of …
  This combination of findings provides some support for the conceptual (or theoretical) premise that …

COMMENTING ON THE FINDINGS

- The test was successful as it was able to identify students who …
  The present results are significant in at least two major respects.
  The results of this study do not explain the occurrence of these adverse events.
  These findings will doubtless be much scrutinized, but there are some immediately dependable conclusions for …
- These findings are rather disappointing.
  However, these results were not very encouraging.

GIVING AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- This is an important issue for future research.
  Research questions that could be asked include …
  There are still many unanswered questions about …
  Several questions remain unanswered at present.
  Despite these promising results, questions remain.
  Further work is required to establish the viability of…
  Further research should be undertaken to investigate the …
  There is abundant room for further progress in determining …

DO AND DO NOT

- DO: Provide context and explain why people should care.

→DON'T: Simply rehash your results.

- DO: Emphasize the positive.

→DON'T: Exaggerate.

- DO: Look toward the future.

→DON'T: End with it.

10 MOST COMMON MISTAKES

- Starting with limitations instead of implications.
- Going overboard on limitations, leading readers to wonder why they should read on.
- Failing to acknowledge limitations or dismissing them out of hand.
- Making strong claims about weak results.
- Failing to differentiate between strong and weak results as you make conclusions about them.
- Lapsing into causal language when your data were correlational.
- Repeating the introduction.
- Restating the results without interpretation or links to other research.
- Presenting new results; such data belong in the results section.
- Offering no concluding statements or ending with the limitations.

Source: Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, PhD, Yale University

REFERENCES

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