

Writing The “Discussion” Section in a Thesis

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Learning objectives

- Meaning of discussion
- Purpose of writing the discussion section.
- The general rules.
- Frameworks and their style.
- Things to avoid.

What is a thesis ?

- A type of scholarly piece of writing based on original research
- Prerequisite as a final step in a academic course, usually an University Masters degree course.

What does “Discussion” mean ?

- The action or process of talking about something in order to reach a decision or to exchange ideas.
- A conversation or debate about a specific topic.

“Discussion” in thesis writing

“Component of thesis which explains the significance of results in that research”

Purpose

- Brings together all the sections of thesis writing
- Focuses on the importance of results and where they fit in the current literature
- Identifies the limitation of the study by being truthful and self critical

How to write the “Discussion” section ?

- General rules
- Writing in a framework
- Advisory from authority

General rules

- Length of Discussion section:
 - Should not exceed the sum of other sections
- Number of paragraphs:
 - Six to seven paragraphs
- Sentences:
 - Should indicate a single point meaning
 - Should not exceed 20-30 words
- Number of words in each paragraphs:
 - No more than 200 words

Creating the framework of “Discussion” section

- Different styles and approaches
- Some examples:
 - Writing by following six basic rules
 - Writing in five sections.
 - Writing in three sets of paragraphs

Creating the framework of “Discussion” section

Six basic rules

- First:
 - Summarize key findings
 - Link summary to research question
 - Seek to answer the research question:
- Second:
 - Place the results in context of present research
 - Analyze how the results fit in with previous research

Creating the framework of “Discussion” section

Six basic rules

- Third:
 - Mention and discuss any unexpected results
- Fourth:
 - Address limitations or weakness of the results
- Fifth:
 - Mention “few gaps” for potential follow up research studies.
- Sixth:
 - Closing with re-statement of the most significant findings and their implications

Creating the framework of “Discussion” section

Five sections

- First section: (Opening section)
 - Style-1: Answer the research question based on key findings of the research
 - Style -2: Re-description of main purpose
 - Style-3: General summary of the findings

Creating the framework of “Discussion” section

Five sections

- Second section: (Subjective judgment)
 - Four steps:
 1. Interpret results
 2. Compare and contrast results with similar studies
 3. Account for the results (form a meaning)
 4. Evaluate findings

Creating the framework of “Discussion” section

Five sections

- Third section:
 - Strength and limitations of the results
- Fourth section: (Implication of the results)
 - State how the results will add up to current knowledge
 - State validity and applicability of the results
- Fifth section: (Recommend future research)
 - State unanswered question or new question

Creating the framework of “Discussion” section

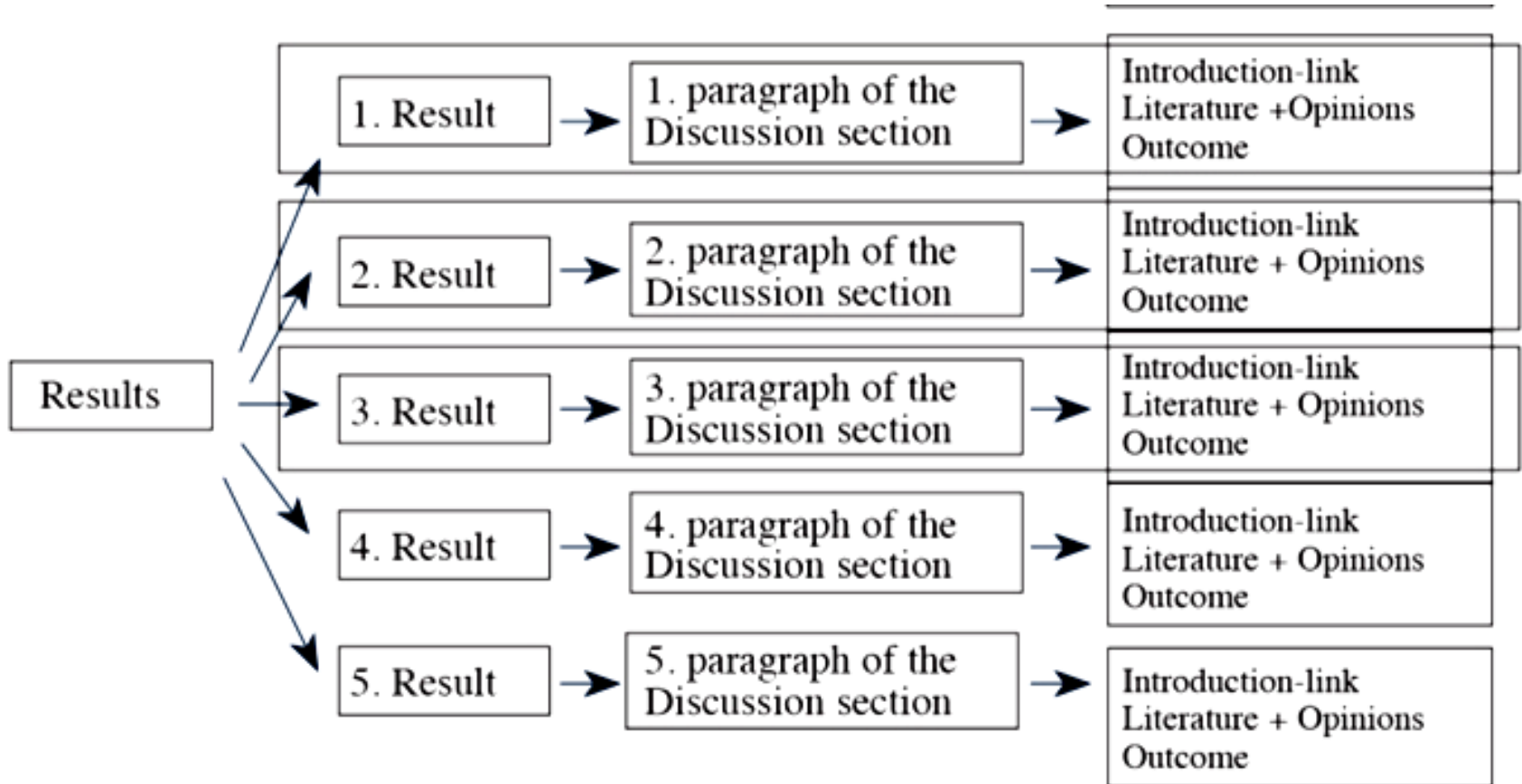
Three paragraphs

- Introductory paragraph:
 - Starts with an un-debatable statement regarding the research question.
 - Address questions: issues, solutions, new idea, contribution of the study.
 - Summarize the basic findings

Creating the framework of “Discussion” section

Three sets of paragraphs

- Intermediate paragraphs: ***Divide and Conquer Tactics***



Creating the framework of “Discussion” section

Three sets of paragraphs

- Concluding paragraph:
 - Mention ‘strong points’ of the study
 - Indicate limitations of the study
 - Point to future directions
 - Emphasize potential application

What to avoid in the “Discussion” section ?

- Avoid rewriting the result section
 - Provide interpretation and analysis of most significant findings
- Avoid drawing conclusion without support
 - Remain evidence based
- Avoid bringing up new information
 - Stay within the bounds of the study
- Avoid ‘cherry-picking’ the results to analyze
 - Discuss both positive and negative results

What to avoid in the “Discussion” section ?

- Avoid trying to impress others:
 - ‘Discussion’ is not a forum to impress the reader with knowledge.
- Avoid over-interpretation or over-inflation
 - Keep within the supported data
- Avoid linguistic ambiguity
 - Concise and clear language
 - Active voice as predominant structure

Summary

- Discussion section focuses on the importance of results and where they fit in the current literature.
- Follow the general rules and write in a framework
- Avoid rewriting the results
- Remain evidence based and within the bound of the research.

References

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- Oner S, Selcuk E, Tzevat T. How to write a discussion section? Turkish Journal of Urology 2013. 39(1): 20-4.

Thank you very much

