

Contents of an APA-Style Research Report: What Information is Where ?

Abstract

- What are the main purposes of the study?
- Who was studied (sample, sample size, special characteristics)?
- How were the subjects selected and assigned to conditions?
- To what conditions were the subjects exposed?
- What type of design was used?
- What are the main findings and conclusions?

Introduction

- What is the background for the study (briefly)?
- What in current theory, research, or clinical work makes this study useful, important or of interest?
- What is different or special about the study in focus, methods, or design to address a need in the area?
- Is the rationale clear regarding the constructs to be assessed?
- What specifically are the purposes, predictions, or hypothesis?

Method

Participants

- Who are the participants and how many are there in this study?
- Why was this sample selected in light of the research goals?
- How was this sample obtained, recruited, and selected?
- What are the demographic characteristics of the sample (e.g., sex, age, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status)?
- What, if any, inclusion or exclusion criteria were invoked, that is, what were the selection rules to obtain the participants?
- How many of those participants who were eligible or recruited actually were selected and participated in the study?
- Was informed consent solicited? How and from whom, if special populations were used?

Materials

- What, if any, presentation or recording apparatus were used -- computers, video cameras, timing devices, etc. ?
- Where was the research conducted -- laboratory or natural setting ?
- Was there a specific "setting", whether laboratory or natural, the details of which may be important to the procedure or the results of the study?

Procedures

- Where was the study conducted (setting)?
- What measures, materials, equipment, or apparatus were used in this study?
- What is the chronological sequence of events to which subjects were exposed?
- What intervals elapsed between different aspects of the study (assessment, treatment, follow-up)?
- If assessments involve novel measures created for this study, what data are offered regarding about reliability and validity?
- What variation in administration of conditions that emerged over the course of the study in ways that may introduce variation within or between conditions?
- What procedural checks were completed to avert potential sources of bias in implementation of the manipulation and assessment of the dependent measures?
- What checks were made to ensure that the conditions were carried out as intended?

What else does the reader need to know to understand how subjects were treated and what conditions were provided?

Design -- sometimes information about the design is included in the 'Participants' or the 'Procedure' sections, and sometimes, if the design is sufficiently complex, in a separate section -- either way, you need to be able to identify the following:

- How were the subjects assigned to conditions or groups?
- How many groups were included in the design?
- How are the groups similar and different in how they are treated in the study?
- Why are these groups critical to address the questions of interest?

Results

- What are the primary measures and data upon which the predictions depend?
- What analyses are to be used and how specifically do these address the original hypotheses and purposes?
- Are the assumptions of the data analyses met?
- If multiple tests are used, what means are provided to control error rates?
- Prior to the experimental conditions, were groups similar on variables that might otherwise explain the results (e.g., diagnosis, age, other demographic variables)?
- Are data missing due to incomplete measures (not filled out completely by the subjects) or due to loss of subjects? If so, how are these handled in the data analyses?
- Are there ancillary analyses that might further inform the primary analyses or exploratory analyses that might stimulate further work?

Discussion

- What are the major findings of the study?
- How do these findings add to research and support, refute, or inform current theory?
- What alternative interpretations can be placed on the data?
- What limitations or qualifiers must be placed on the study given methodological and design issues?
- What research follows from the study to move the field forward?