

## Function, structure and features

<b>Title</b>	<p>Initial contact with the reader who decides on the basis of the title whether to read on. Structure and exact length depend on journal guidelines.</p> <p>Three main types: interrogative (contains the research question), declarative (contains the main finding) and indicative (contains the topic, and sometimes the study type). The length ranges usually from 10 to 20 words, uses large print, and is capitalized either just the initial word, or each lexical word. Articles and verbs are used sparingly.</p>
<b>Authors</b>	<p>Provides contact details, and is a factor in determining credibility. There are no fixed rules about the order in which the names are listed, but conventions suggest that the first name is the main author, and the final name the supervisor of the study. Affiliations are always present, but qualifications and/or job title can also be provided. Sometimes a paragraph in the penultimate section will provide specific details on author contributions.</p>
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>This is the second major element in the decision process for a potential reader. When full access is not available it is the only thing that will be read, so it needs to contain all the important information.</p> <p>The IMR&amp;D structure is generally reflected in its organization, although the discussion is reduced to the conclusion only. Abstracts can be short compact paragraphs where structure is implicit, or longer structured sections with subheadings that are usually imposed by the journal's guidelines for authors. Abstracts avoid abbreviations and excessive use of numbers.</p> <p>Often a number of keywords (usually compounds which are more relevant in searches) are present. However, since full-text search is now extremely common, some journals no longer require keywords. These should ideally complement the title.</p>
<b>Introduction</b>	<p>This section needs to place the study in context and justify it. It generally contains four phases. An opening sentence (or two) will situate the topic broadly (present tense usually). This is followed by a review of the literature (present perfect often used) in order to place the study in the context of previous research on the topic. The logical development from this is the identification of a research need, or gap in the literature, which the present study fills. Finally the authors describe the objectives and scope of the work. Sometimes this section can be very long, especially in the case of a multidisciplinary study.</p>
<b>Methods</b>	<p>The methods section is vital in guaranteeing that a study is reproducible. It is written in an objective style, often using the passive tense, and should contain three major parts. The study population is described initially, followed by the measurements section where the authors describe what data was collected and how, and finally the data analysis is described. The length of this section often depends on whether equipment needs describing and illustrating, and readers need to make sure that the authors have done as much as possible to assure internal validity by eliminating bias and adjusting for confounders.</p>

<b>Results</b>	The results section should enable the reader to identify quickly what the main findings are. It is the section where text and illustrations need to complement each other. Well-chosen, and informatively labeled illustrations can stand alone, with the text only providing further information. Depending on the complexity of the study, the organization of this section may echo the methods section. The tense used in the results is mostly simple past tense.
<b>Discussion</b>	The aim of the discussion is to examine the results in the light of the authors' objective(s) (cf. introduction) and in the context of related studies. It generally contains three parts; statement of main findings and relation to the literature, strengths and weaknesses of the study, conclusion and perspectives for further studies. These perspectives should follow logically on from the limits identified in the second part of this section. The reader should find mentioned here any biases inherent to the study design (cf. methods section). Since the authors comment on their results, it is common to find regular use of modality, both using modal auxiliaries (e.g. "This may explain why...") and equivalent expressions (e.g. "It is possible that...") to reflect the degree of certitude concerning possible explanations.
<b>Acknowledgements etc.</b>	<p>In this section one can find a number of different elements. The acknowledgements paragraph is almost universally present, and contains words of thanks in three main areas; scientific (statisticians, lab technicians, colleagues in other fields), administrative (secretarial, layout, liaising with journal) and linguistic (proofreading and/or translating). Occasionally authors also thank the reviewers.</p> <p>Other elements that appear in this part of the paper may include financial disclosures, funding information, details on author contribution, ethical considerations etc. The elements here tend to be short, neutral paragraphs.</p>
<b>References</b>	Depending on the length, complexity and density of the paper, there may be many references. Some journals provide minimum and maximum numbers. Their purpose is to ground the study and to justify affirmations. The format is dictated by house style, using one of the accepted standards, and so the list can be numbered, chronological or alphabetical, and the way the references are evoked in the body of the article will depend on the format. The references are usually used in two sections; the introduction, and the discussion. However, sometimes references are required in the methods section. A careful reader will pay attention to the sources, dates and authors of the articles in the references, and also to their distribution in the text. Red flags which require some sort of justification include excessive self-citation by the authors, a large number of references to articles published in the same journal, lack of recent references and articles cited in the article several times.
<b>Annexes</b>	Annexes, or appendices are often used to include documents that allow the reader to better understand the publication. Questionnaires used in a study are among the most common types of annex. Nowadays however, annexes have mostly disappeared from printed material, and are published online only as supplementary information.
<b>Comments &amp; replies</b>	Historically, comments on articles were published in subsequent issues of the journal along with author responses where appropriate. These are now available online and directly accessible from the page where the article is published.