Introduction

...(aka “Background”) presents the rationale for the study. It is structured as a critical review of the research literature. Keep in mind that your research probably looks at the association between Two Phenomena. Examples: 1. Group Visits and 2. Childhood Obesity; or 1. Problem Lists and 2. Staff Training. With these Two Phenomena in mind, structure the Introduction like so:

Paragraph 1. “What do we already know about Phenom 1?” Cite research articles addressing prevalence and harms (obesity) or benefits (physical activity).

Paragraph 2 introduces Phenom 2, and presents “What do we already know about Phenom 1 and its association with Phenom 2?”

Paragraph 3 addresses what is unique about your study. Does it address a gap in the research literature? A limitation of previous research? An issue particular to your community? (like high rates of diabetes amputations, or minority populations?)

Final Paragraph. Finish by stating the aim of your study, or the research hypotheses.

Methods

...is the easiest section to write; I often start my writing project here.

1. Setting & Subjects. Describe: Where did you conduct the research, and what are the inclusion and exclusion criteria for your subjects?

2. Intervention (if you do one). Interventions include medicines, group visits, educational programs, clinical improvements, and other things.

3. Measurement. Describe Phenom 1 and Phenom 2. How did you assess if they are high or low, better or worse, present or absent? If you are using a survey, describe the concepts addressed by your survey questions (e.g. knowledge, attitudes, behaviors) and the scoring plan for the survey.

4. Procedure for gathering data. How did you conduct your research? Who did it? Did you use surveys, chart reviews, lab findings, observation?

5. Analysis. Restate your research aims/ hypotheses, and describe how you will analyze them. Use statistical methods for numeric information, (like lab values and survey scores) and use qualitative methods for text information (like interview transcripts).

Results

My general strategy is to draft tables of my findings and describe them.

Describe the sample: age, gender, ethnic background, and other information relevant to your study.

Middle section. Describe simple analyses of Phenom 1 and Phenom 2.

Final section. Describe more complex (multivariate) analyses.

Discussion

Paragraph 1. Summarize your most exciting findings. Compare these to others’ research; is it “consistent with,” or “departing from” previous findings?

Paragraph 2. Do you have puzzling or surprising findings? If so, describe potential explanations.

Paragraph 3. Describe the limitations of the study. Does your sample allow generalizability? Are your surveys susceptible to response bias? Is your sample size large enough?

Final Paragraph or “Conclusions.” End with recommendations. If you have researched a clinical issue, provide recommendations for clinicians—how will they use this information? If you have researched a curriculum, provide recommendations for teachers.

I am grateful to Dr. Barry Weiss, former editor of Family Medicine, who taught me how to write an Introduction, and Lucy Candob who taught me how to get unstuck.