

Table 1 Typical structure of a research paper

Introduction

State why the problem you address is important

State what is lacking in the current knowledge

State the objectives of your study or the research question

Methods

Describe the context and setting of the study

Specify the study design

Describe the 'population' (patients, doctors, hospitals, etc.)

Identify the main study variables

Describe data collection instruments and procedures

Outline analysis methods

Results

Report on data collection and recruitment (response rates, etc.)

Present key findings with respect to the central research question

Present secondary findings (secondary outcomes, etc.)

Discussion

State the main findings of the study

Discuss the main results with reference to previous research

Discuss mechanisms of the results

Analyse the strengths and limitations of the study

Offer perspectives for future work

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<http://intqhc.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/16/3/191/T1>

Table 2 Common mistakes seen in manuscripts

- The research question is not specified
- The stated aim of the paper is tautological (e.g. 'The aim of this paper is to describe what we did') or vague (e.g. 'We explored issues related to X')
- The structure of the paper is chaotic (e.g. methods are described in the Results section)
- The manuscripts does not follow the journal's instructions for authors
- The paper much exceeds the maximum number of words allowed
- The Introduction is an extensive review of the literature
- Methods are not described in sufficient detail
- Results are reported selectively
- The same results appear both in a table and in the text
- Detailed tables are provided for results that do not relate to the main research question
- In the Introduction and Discussion, key arguments are not backed up by appropriate references
- References **are out of date** or cannot be accessed by most readers
- The Discussion does not provide an answer to the research question
- The Discussion overstates the implications of the results and does not acknowledge the limitations of the study
- The paper is written in poor English