

WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES: BIOLOGY

Biology writing helps an audience learn the results of an experiment, for their own knowledge or research. The audience expects detailed data, graphic data (charts, diagrams, etc.), objectivity, and clarity.

AUDIENCE

- Researchers
- Professors
- Peers
- Government
- Businesses
- General public

TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS

- Lab notebooks
- Research papers
- Lab reports
- Literature reviews
- Research proposals

STYLE CONVENTIONS

- Active voice (as opposed to other sciences, which generally use passive voice)
- Paraphrasing is preferred to direct quotation
- Past tense for material, methods, and results
- Present tense for established information (e.g. scientific laws, others' research, etc.)
- Use scientific names
- Include specific data and use concise, detailed, clear, and sufficient wording

LAB REPORT VS. RESEARCH PAPER

The purpose of both is to describe an experiment and its results. Both include the following:

- **Title Page:** Includes title, lab partners, class, instructor, and date
- **Abstract:** Includes question/purpose, experimental approach, results, conclusion/implication, and optional background information
- **Introduction:** Includes topic and its relevancy, strong thesis that outlines the paper, necessary background, and goal or purpose of the study
- **Methods/Procedure:** Represent, in detail (to allow for study duplication), how you followed through the procedure to test the hypothesis
- **Data/Results:** Include experimental findings and observations; may include tables and figures
- **Discussion:** Includes interpretation of the results and comparison of results to others' findings
- **Conclusion:** Summarizes findings and interpretations
- **References:** Cite all sources mentioned in the paper in APA, CSE, or another style

CITATIONS

Use APA and the author-date system of CMS. Both styles require parenthetical citations and a reference list. The author-date system of Chicago does not require footnotes.

TAKEAWAY TIPS

- Use specialized vocabulary used such as “methods,” “results,” “double-blind study,” etc.
- When reporting conclusions and discussing another’s work, use past tense
- When discussing results, use present tense
- Avoid using subjective expressions like “I think” and “I feel”



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