

Writing the Methods or Procedures Section

Information Components

In order for your reader to judge whether the results of your study can be trusted, and to understand the limitations of your findings, you must describe **how** you carried out your study systematically, adequately and clearly. This will also enable anyone who wants to **replicate** your study to **verify** your findings to be able to do so.

1. What to Include

A good description of the methods or procedures you have used in your study should include the following:

- A **systematic, step-by-step account** of what you did in carrying out your experiment, survey or any other form of study: if your study comprises a few **different stages** or parts, the account should be divided into these stages or parts.
- Exact and **specific information** on **technical details** such as the ratio of dilution, pH range, temperature, duration of application of a force, etc. for experiments, and period of survey, statistical tests applied and degree of confidence used, etc. for surveys.
- **Justifications** or **reasons** for why you chose to do certain things in the way you did.

2. *How Much to Include*

A common issue for many writers is how detailed the step-by-step account needs to be. A good rule-of-thumb to follow is that your account should be complete and detailed enough for any reader to carry out the same procedure without missing any important steps.

More specific guidelines include the following:

- If you are using an established procedure *without modification*, you do not need to go into detail, especially if it is very well-known. Name the procedure or experiment, and if you think it is necessary for your reader, summarise it.
- You may also need to justify why you have adopted the procedure.
- If you are using an established procedure, but modifying some of the steps, describe the changes in sufficient detail, and draw attention to them.
- Be sure to explain the reasons for each modification.
- If you are using a novel procedure which you have come up with, describe it in as precise detail as possible. Also, explain how you came up with your procedure, as well as justify why you have taken each step.

3. *How to Organise and Present the Information*

To help your readers to follow your description of your procedures more easily, consider carefully how you may organise and present your information to enhance readability.

Here are three possible strategies:

1. If you are permitted to do so, present your procedure (or some parts of it) in a list of numbered steps instead of in a continuous paragraph.
2. Use sub-headings to identify main stages and steps in the procedure, especially if the description is long.
3. Use appropriate visuals to enhance the clarity of some of the information. You may, for instance, sum up important parts of a procedure in a flowchart or schematic diagram, or use a table for some details.