



## Helpful Hints for Writing Lab Reports

*Adapted from Warren D. Dolphin's "Writing Lab Reports and Scientific Papers"*

- If you are having trouble starting your report, you may wish to start with the Results section (tables and graphs).
- Your materials and methods section is likely to be repetitive, and that is okay.
- Write in third person and with complete sentences. For example, instead of saying, "We weighed the frogs and put them in a glass jar," write, "The frogs were weighed and put in a glass jar."
- Lab reports are meant to be professional, so avoid contractions and slang just as you would in an English essay.
- Use past tense and be specific. Vague/ambiguous phrases are to be avoided because scientific papers are meant to be as accurate as possible so that later researchers can replicate your results.

*The following examples illustrate lack of precision:*

1. "The sample was incubated in mixture A minus B plus C." Does the mixture lack both B and C or lack B and contain C?
2. The title "Protection against Carcinogenesis by Antioxidants" leaves the reader wondering whether antioxidants protect from or cause cancer.

### **Stylistic Specifics:**

- All scientific names (genus and species) must be italicized.
- Use the metric system of measurements. Abbreviations of units are used without a following period.
- Be aware that the word *data* is plural while *datum* is singular. This affects the choice of a correct verb. The word *species* is used both as a singular and as a plural.
- Numbers should be written as numerals when they are greater than ten or when they are associated with measurements; for example, 6 mm or 2 g, but *two* explanations of *six* factors. When one list includes numbers over and less than ten, all numbers in the list may be expressed as numerals; for example, 17 sunfish, 13 bass, and 2 trout. If a sentence must start with a numeral, spell it out.
- Be sure to divide paragraphs correctly and to use starting and ending sentences that indicate the

purpose of the paragraph. A report or a section of a report should not be one long paragraph.

- Even if your instructor does not specify which method to use when citing your sources, be consistent in whatever way you choose to cite sources.
- Do not use lone URLs in your citations.