



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.