

Clever title that sums up the research article

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The abstract summarises the contents of the research article. It's tempting to just read the abstract, but remember this is how the authors have interpreted the results. You need to look at the results yourself and come to your own conclusions based on the data provided.

A typical abstract structure might be: (1) background information to provide context, (2) the research question, (3) how the research question was answered, (4) the main results, and (5) the significance of the study.

Use the title and abstract to decide if the paper is relevant to your research topic and if it is worth investing time reading the whole paper.

INTRODUCTION

Provides background information about the research topic.

Towards the end of the introduction you will often find the:

- Research question
- Approach taken to answer the question

It's important to identify the research question so you can decide whether it has been answered.

METHODS

Details. What methods did the researchers use to answer the question?

Jargon. Methods are full of jargon (technical language) and can be difficult to understand. Methods will become easier to understand when you're working in a lab and doing experiments on a daily basis!

Best available? Think about whether these methods are robust and answer the question.

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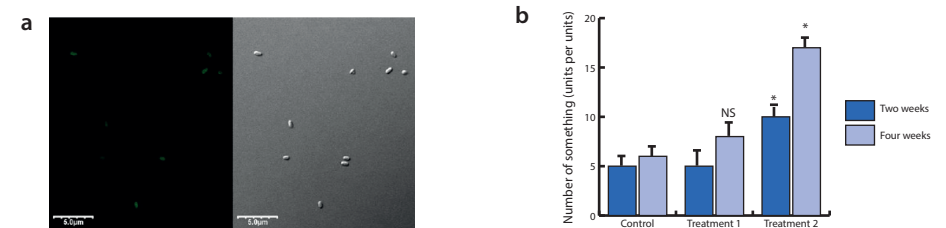


Figure 1 What do you think the data show? (a) Data may be presented as images. (b) Or as graphs or tables. Are you convinced by the results? How many samples were tested? Were the appropriate controls used? Do the graphs have error bars? What statistical tests were performed?

RESULTS

Use the sub-headings for skimming articles and locating information

Raw data are summarised as figures and tables with accompanying text.

Look at the tables and figures first. What do you think they show?

Then read the text which should describe the important trends.

DISCUSSION

Sometimes the results and discussion are combined as a single section

The discussion is where the authors interpret their results. You should have already made your own conclusions based on the evidence presented to you. Do you agree with the authors' interpretation?

The authors usually discuss the strengths and limitations of the work in this section.

The discussion often includes what the authors think the significance of the work is and how it relates to the bigger picture.

REFERENCES

1. Having trouble finding research material?
2. Check the reference list for links to more journal articles on the same topic.