

# Nurse Author & Editor

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### Developing Qualitative Research Discussions

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This article describes how to use various Microsoft Office Word functions to develop discussions in qualitative research articles. It covers:

- Creating and using discussion templates.
- Displaying article sections simultaneously.
- Developing discussions.
- Converting discussion tables to paragraphs.
- Writing transitions.
- Cutting word count.
- Advantages of this method.

All MS Word 2003 window, function, and command names are in *italic*.

### Creating and using discussion templates

Create a table (don't use the tab function):

1. Select *Table>Insert>Table* in the Word menu and submenus.
2. Type 3 in the *Number of columns* field (you can always add or delete columns).
3. Type 3 in the *Number of rows* field (you can always add or delete rows).
4. Select *Auto* for the *Fixed column width* prompt.
5. Select OK, and the table is displayed.

Now you're ready to turn the table into a discussion template that you can reuse:

6. Type column headings, such as these, in the table's first row (depending on your needs):

Previous research findings	Your findings	Conclusions
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7. Save the file: give it a name such as *disc\_tmplt*, and close the file.
8. Open *disc\_tmplt*, select *Save As...*, and give the file a new name (e.g., *Disc\_draft\_1*).

Note: Table-generating macros are also an option for developing table-based templates.

### Displaying article sections simultaneously

To fill in the table cells under each column heading, you must be able to see previously developed information. These instructions (i) assume that you've created sections, such as these, in another file: literature review; problem statement; hypothesis or objectives; and results/findings and (ii) describe how to display information in those sections while you develop the discussion section:

1. Open the new file (e.g., *Disc\_draft\_1*).
2. Open the file that contains the sections that precede the discussion section.

2. Click on the *Restore down* button in the upper-right corner (look for two overlapping squares between the *Close* (X) button and the *Minimize* (–) button. (When you click on *Restore down*, one square is displayed.)
3. Select the *Restore down* button in the new discussion file (e.g., *Disc\_draft\_1*).
4. Resize both files by dragging the sides of the windows. Do not allow the sides of the windows to overlap and make the new file window a bit wider so that you can easily work in it.

Note: For more instructions on how to view two parts of a document simultaneously, select *Help*.

## Developing the discussion

These instructions assume that you have two files displayed:

1. Type Discussion above the table in the new file, and select *Heading 1* from the font style window (or select *Format>Styles and Formatting>Heading 1*).

2. Write an introduction after the discussion heading, for example:

This section takes up: (i) previous research results; (ii) results from this study; and (iii) our conclusions based on all results.

Or

This section discusses possible practical applications of the findings:

- First heading after the findings heading (or a short summary of the first paragraph in the findings section).
- Second heading or a summary of the second paragraph.
- Third heading or a summary of the third paragraph.

2. Copy the above items, paste them below the introduction paragraph or list, highlight them, and select *Heading 2* from the font style window (or select *Format>Styles and Formatting>Heading 2*). If necessary, you can remove the headings after you've developed the discussion.

3. Highlight and cut the discussion table, and paste it below each heading after the discussion's introduction, for example:

### Discussion

This section ...

First heading

Previous research findings	Your findings	Your conclusions

Second heading

Previous research findings	Your findings	Your conclusions

4. Fill in all table cells by scrolling, for example, to the literature review in the other file and using that information in column 1: Previous research findings. Repeat this step for the next column, rows, and tables.

5. Close the file with the other sections, resize the discussion file, i.e., fill the screen with it, and continue working with the discussion table. Here is a sample discussion table under development:

Using computers saves time and money and improves quality

Previous research findings	Your findings	Your conclusions
Petersen (1997) claims that authors, editors, and reviewers save time if they use computers to write, edit, and review manuscripts. Others (Jones, 2003; Smith, 2005) proved that productivity improves as authors, editors, and reviewers become familiar with software and related processes and that necessity facilitated a short learning curve. Our findings are aligned with this previous research.	Video recordings of all review meetings revealed that the computer group's meetings were shorter because (i) grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors were reduced and (ii) there was no need to discuss inconsistent terminology. Data captured from the interviews revealed that ...	Maintaining the status quo will not save time and money and will not improve quality over the long term. Based on all research to date, we conclude that nursing departments should set aside resources that enable all students and staff members to become proficient computer users.

Account for these items, as appropriate, when developing a discussion:

- Don't repeat everything you wrote in the findings/results section.
- Answer these questions:
  - Are your findings aligned with previous research findings? If so, state that fact.
  - Do your findings vary from previous findings? If so, summarize how they vary.
- Develop your conclusions regarding new knowledge uncovered in your study, i.e., might your findings:
  - Contribute to new concept development?
  - Question existing concepts?
  - Have potential for theory development?
  - Question existing theory? Or, take it forward?
  - Contribute perspectives regarding various methodologies?
  - Contribute data that might enhance clinical practice improvements?

Once you fill in all tables, your discussion section is outlined, and you're ready for the next step.

5. Inspect and correct information in each table cell to ensure that terminology, wording, and references in the discussion table are consistent and aligned with sections such as literature review, problem statement, hypothesis, or objectives, and results/findings.

6. Search for and remove unnecessary repetition.

7. Highlight the discussion table and run the spelling and grammar checker.

Because the table format facilitates readability, legibility, and usability, try to do much as you can with the table before you turn it into paragraphs.

## Converting discussion tables to paragraphs

1. Position the cursor inside the table.
2. Select *Table>Convert>Table to text*.
3. Click on the *Paragraph marks* button under the *Separate text with* prompt.
4. Select OK.

## Writing transitions

Lead reviewers and eventually readers from one paragraph to another, for example:

- Our findings are aligned with this previous research.
- Our results confirm the Smith (2010) study and further add that . . .
- Because our findings vary significantly from previous research, we draw these conclusions.
- This conclusion requires further investigation.

If articles in the targeted journal contain no subheadings in discussion sections, then consider transforming the subheadings that you created earlier into transitions.

## Cutting word count

Discussions can be wordy. Here are some short cuts that help cut word count:

Type this in Word's Find field...	Try to replace it with ...
a large number of/a number of	many or several or give the exact number
appear to be	seem, seems (as appropriate)
are already, have already been	Delete already
are more likely	might
as a result of	because of or due to
as well as	and
at present	now
at the start of the 19xxs, in the beginning of the 19xxs	in the early 19xxs
both	Delete if two items are close:... in clinical and non-clinical ...
build up/building up	build/building
divide up/dividing up	divide/dividing
carried out	done, did, implemented, performed
do/does	Does a verb follow do or does? Then delete do or does.
due to the fact that	because
give rise to/given rise to	lead to/led to

has to/have to/need to	must
in accordance with	according to or as per
in addition to	besides
in order to	to
is likely to be	Try: might be or is probably
of great importance	very important
period of time	period or time period
point in time	time
point of view	viewpoint
prior to	before
take place	occur
takes place	occurs
to a great extent	Put greatly before the verb
to a large extent	Put largely before the verb
with the exception of	except for

For more help with wordiness, refer to publications such as *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White (online at Bartleby.com) and *Edit Yourself* by Bruce Ross-Larson (Barnes & Noble Books, 2003, ISBN 076073609X, 9780760736098).

## Advantages

This table-based method ensures that discussions are clear, concise, and consistent and that no information is missing—because if table cells are empty, then information is missing. You also save development time; reduce revision time (due to reviewers' comments); cut translating and editing costs; and increase your chances of getting published.

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