

## Tip Sheet 3. Describing Data in Text

When you write about the results of your research, you must clearly describe important findings, and you must concisely state why these findings extend knowledge and how they improve understanding.

You choose language and words. You choose sentence structure. You follow conventions to place punctuation. Below is a list of choices categorized by **Do ...** and **Do Not ...** to help clarify your choices.

DO ...	DO NOT ...
Describe your methods and results in the PAST tense (Your work is not in the body of knowledge until published).	Imply arrogance by placing your work in the body of knowledge before it is published (check verb tense to journal guidelines).
Describe data from references to prior published work in the PRESENT tense.	Imply ignorance by placing published work outside the body of knowledge (in the past tense).
Describe representative data from tables	Describe all data indiscriminately.
Choose units that eliminate excess zeroes.	E.g., use 150,000 g instead of 150 kg
Summarize repetitive patterns of data in tables as clear sentences; do highlight the unexpected.	Repeat indiscriminately what is already stated in tables; don't highlight the expected.
Write clearly and concisely:	Lose important results in excess verbiage:
—Use correct subjects and action predicates.	—Substitute pronouns for nouns without care.
—Place modifiers next to the object described.	—Misplace modifiers.
—Use complete noun phrases when referring to data from tables or graphics.	—Misuse labels from tables and graphics in text because these are often abbreviations.
—Explain what are significant data and why it is significant; compare in comparable units.	—Assume readers understand the statistical tests and results. Don't compare different units.
—Use comparative adjectives between two items (e.g., -er suffix or "more" or "less").	—Neglect clues in language usage that readers need to clarify a result.
—Use superlative adjectives among 3 or more items (e.g., -est suffix or "most" or "least")	—Mislead readers by making unsurprising data appear to be an unexpected result
—Make singular subjects agree with singular verbs; plural subjects with plural verbs.	—"Data" is plural; "datum" is singular.
—Use nouns as the subject that acts.	—Verbalize or Verbify (definition dates to 1600), i.e., make verbs into subjects or objects.
—Use verbs as the predicate.	—Nominalize (definition dates to about 1610), i.e., make nouns into verbs.
—Use "the" to mean a particular thing or specific things.	—I.e., the subject or the subjects; the data.
—Use "a" or "an" to mean one of many things.	—I.e., a subject, an introduction, a data set.
—Use numerals in text.	—Mix numerals and words for numbers in text.
—Use standard abbreviations and units of measure.	—Invent abbreviations.

