INTERPRETING SECTIONS OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Published research generally follows an established format with specific sections to allow others to easily follow along and compare different studies. Being aware of this format - and what is included in each section - can help you critically evaluate and interpret a study.[1]

SECTION	WHAT IS IT?	QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF
Abstract	A concise summary, including key points from all other sections	Reminder: An abstract alone does not provide enough detail to assess the quality of validity of the study. Keep reading!
Introduction	Provides background to establish context of the research	• What is the main research question or purpose of the study? • Why is this topic important? • What are the gaps in what we know on this topic? (i.e. why is this research needed)
Methodology	Describes how the study was set up and completed	• Does the research design fit the study's purpose? • Are the methods clear enough that other researchers could reproduce the study? Additional things to look for: • Subject characteristics (age, gender, health status, etc.) • Study design (experimental, observational, etc.) • Intervention details (treatment, control group) • Assessments / tests used for measurement • Acknowledgement / control of confounding factors
Results	Shares the key data, outcomes, and findings of the study	• Are the results significant (statistically & clinically / practically)? • Did the results presented address the research question / purpose of the study?
Discussion & Conclusion	An in-depth exploration of results to answer the main research question	• Are the stated conclusions supported by the data and results? • What are the limitations of the study? And how might they influence the results? • Are there similar studies? If so, how do the results compare? • How does this study add to knowledge or current evidence on the topic studied?

References

1. International Food Information Council. Understanding & Interpreting Food & Health Scientific Studies: Guidance For Food & Nutrition Communicators. Published Mar 2024. Accessed Nov 4, 2026. https://foodinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/IFIC-Science-Communication-Guidance-Document.pdf

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