

The discussion

The discussion section is concerned with interpreting the meaning of your research.

You should review your own research in relation to the wider context in which the project is located. You can refer back to the rationale that you gave for your research in the literature review, and discuss what your own research has added in this context.

It is important to show that you appreciate the limitations of your research, and how these may affect the validity (meaningfulness) or usefulness of your findings. Given the acknowledged limitations, you can report on the implications of your findings for theory, research, and practice.

Moderator comments

There is a comprehensive discussion of the findings in relation to the hypothesis and also the sociobiological theory which underpinned the study. Furthermore, the student has discussed the findings in relation to previous research (e.g. Harrison and Saeed).

The purpose of the discussion is to consider previously mentioned research in relation to your own research. Therefore it is not expected that you will introduce new research here.

Moderator comments

This gives a clear statement of the results and relates the results to a published theory. There is also important further material in the form of a brief alternative explanation.

Word count

For projects with secondary data the discussion may be the longest part of your REPORT, as much as 3000 or 4000 words with a short introduction plus a conclusion. Or the introduction may be longer and a shorter discussion. In Exemplar II (pages 112–115) the discussion section is about 3000 words.

For projects with primary data, you will have method and findings to report as well so the discussion may be about 1500 words. See Exemplar III on pages 120–121.

For projects with an artefact the report is only 1000 words long and the method section will be as important as the introduction and discussion. See Exemplar I on page 109.

Structure of this section of your report

It may help to structure your discussion as follows (you can include the subheadings if you wish):

1. Explain the findings in relation to the hypothesis

If you worked with a hypothesis then you should begin the discussion by explaining your results in relation to the research hypothesis. Do more than *state* the findings, try to *explain* them. It may help to discuss some particular examples. Relate findings to the aims/hypothesis. You can also explain other findings such as comments from participants during debriefing. In the case of a correlational project, be careful to not use causal language to discuss your results; unless you did an experiment you cannot infer causality.

Exemplar

EPQ title: To what extent do we seek partners of the same levels of attractiveness?

The results from the study do support the directional hypothesis because 13.2% of women were found to be seeking attractiveness in a partner, whereas 25.2% of men sought physical attractiveness. The hypothesis can therefore be accepted 'Men are more likely than women to seek qualities of attractiveness in a partner of the opposite sex'.

Females were significantly more likely to refer to their own attractiveness than males, with 54.7% referring to their own attractiveness as opposed to 40.8% of males. This supports the sociobiological theory, as females see their attractiveness as being a significant factor when successfully acquiring a mate. This compared well with research carried out by Harrison and Saeed (1977), who found that men seek physically attractive women who are younger than them. So women make more reference to their physical attractiveness. Similarly the present study related to the research carried out by Waynforth and Dunbar (1995) who found that 68% of women referred to their physical attractiveness while only 51% of men referred to their physical attractiveness.

JUSTIN'S EPQ ON
ATTRACTIVENESS

2. Explain the findings in relation to previous research (literature review)

It is important to carefully consider all possible explanations for your project's results. Consider how the findings/conclusions from other research and/or experts may be combined with yours to derive a new or perhaps better-substantiated understanding of the problem.

Questions and issues raised by previous research may have been the driving force behind your EPQ. So you will need to discuss how your research supports the results of previous studies.

It is also important to indicate the points of departure between your research and previous research.

Exemplar

EPQ title: An analysis of whether the perceived controllability of the 'victim' is a factor in willingness to donate to charities

The study found that participants were more willing to donate to charities that they considered to be deserving than those considered non-deserving. The research found that the MacMillan cancer support charity was rated as the charity participants would most likely to make a donation to. However, addiction charities such as Action on Addiction were also rated highly. The results departed from previous research such as Weiner's (1992) attribution theory, which states that the determining factor of whether to help someone is the perceived controllability of their predicament. If a victim was perceived as responsible for their plight they would not receive help compared to a victim whose plight was out of their control. This can explain why cancer charities received more sympathy from respondents than addiction charities according to Weiner. This research challenges this as some respondents believed that although addicts may not be blameless this did not mean that they were unworthy of help. Also cultural changes between 1992 and 2014 may have been responsible for a change in perceived controllability.

KYLE'S EPQ ON
CHARITY

An exemplar of strengths and limitations

EPQ title: What are the religious issues involved in school-based PE for Muslim students?

Potential limitations include the possibility of bias, uncritical insider positioning, loss of detachment and objectivity in scientific research. According to Benn et al. (2010) 'all researchers have value positions and face similar dangers. Scientific approaches depend on world-view and can be complementary' (p.10).

A further limitation is that, because of the age of the Muslim girls in the sample, they often had difficulties in verbalising their broader understanding of PE. Furthermore, they often found difficulty in articulating

their experiences in PE. As with the findings of Nugent and Faucette (1995), others had difficulties in expressing their opinions in a consistent way.

A strength of this work is the quality of relationships sustained with the respondents. Without their open and honest accounts, willingness to participate (and for the teachers sample) to find time in their busy schedules, this research would not have been possible. The depth of interview responses with the Muslim sample increased with time. The advantage of having a small sample of girls was that all of the pupils in this year group were interviewed and I did not have to rely on the teachers to select a representative sample for me. Only one pupil declined the opportunity to take part.

GRACE'S EPQ
ON IDENTITY

Moderator comments

Insider status has been discussed successfully as a limitation of the research. Grace also gives a candid account of other limitations of her research. She will not lose marks by pointing these limitations out but instead she will gain marks for the reflection on the limitations. She has also considered one strength, to her credit, as it is often harder to think of strengths.

3. Strengths and limitations of your project

All studies have limitations. Even the best studies in the most prestigious journals have limitations. The limitations can be linked to your methodology or the type of participants used or the design you used. For example, you might consider why the type of participants would affect the conclusions of the study or you might consider why participants did not answer the questions honestly. Avoid simplistic criticisms such as saying the sample was too small.

You can also point out the strengths of your project. For instance, you might mention the extensive piloting that was done to improve the design of the study and avoid certain problems.

The box at the top of this page gives an example of how Grace wrote her strengths and limitations.

4. Implications

Although your EPQ may have provided the answer to your research questions, there may still be some questions left unanswered. You need to briefly mention further investigations that could be done to clarify your working hypotheses.

You might, for example, suggest that a further study could collect qualitative data to provide insights into why participants behaved as they did, or you might suggest using focus groups to provide further data.

For example, here is an implication from Grace's EPQ:

EPQ title: What are the religious issues involved in school-based PE for Muslim students?

It would seem imperative that teachers are encouraged to expand their understanding of Muslim girls' attitudes towards and experiences of physical activity to one that includes physical culture. This would entail exploring the meanings that girls attach to sports, activities, clothes, friendship groups, music and the media and the ways in which they relate to the physical culture (Macdonald 2002).

Moreover, Initial Teacher Training and subsequent CPD may be the very context through which to develop these wider understandings of the needs of teenage Muslim girls. There is evidence to suggest that teacher education programmes have not given sufficient attention to critical issues of culture and diversity (Goodwin 2007) and subjective experiences are often sidelined (Flintoff 1993, Rich 2001).

Here is an implication from Kyle's EPQ on Charity:

EPQ title: An analysis of whether the perceived controllability of the 'victim' is a factor in willingness to donate to charities

There is a need to address what charities can do to increase their chance of donations especially amongst causes that are thought to be less deserving. Breaking down any barriers to giving, especially perceptions that donors might have about the worthiness of causes is therefore a key issue. By appropriately framing the cause and by supporting the development of empathy for the cause should maximise donations.

EXERCISE 4.9 Good discussion

Four elements that should be in the discussion section are listed on this spread.

Read the following example of part of a discussion section from a study that has looked at drinking preferences. Identify the elements of the discussion you find in each sentence of the text.

① The results from the investigation supported the alternative hypothesis that predicted that that female Sixth form students overestimate the amount of alcohol male peers want a typical 18-year-old female to drink. ② These findings support those of Labrie *et al.* (2009) but contrast to those of Lewis and Neighbors (2004), who did not find a mismatch between male and female perceptions of drinking. ③ The results show that women's motivations for drinking may relate to a motivation to develop and maintain social relationships (Eagly 1978, Gilligan 1982, Gleason 1994). ④ A further explanation is that it supports research that suggests that men find it attractive and sexually appealing when a woman can drink as much as a man does (Young *et al.* 2005). ⑤ This study shows that males prefer their sexual partners to drink less and one of the main reasons for this might be that males may have an awareness of the dangers of alcohol and related health risks and also fears of infidelity from heavy drinking partners as drinking may be a precursor to sexual encounters. Hence if their partner drinks heavily there may be a risk of infidelity. ⑥ If females mistakenly believe that males want them to drink more this makes them more likely to drink to risky levels. ⑦ The present investigation had several limitations. An opportunity sample of 20 Sixth form male and 20 female students was selected from only one school. This is unlikely to represent the views of the target population. Also as students were only 18 they may have limited experiences of drinking alcohol and so further research could investigate undergraduates where drinking is more culturally ingrained into University life. ⑧ A more diverse sample may increase the validity of the findings. ⑨ Self-report data is also an area of concern with issues of social desirability although answers were confidential which may increase validity. ⑩ The questions were also forced choice and closed and participants were not able to expand on their answers. A future study could include both closed and open questions to establish why males do not want their sexual partners to engage in heavy drinking. ⑪ The findings have implications for health promotion aimed at females to correct errors in the perceived preferences of opposite-sex peers. These interventions may correct not only the misperceptions but also encourage safer levels of drinking in females.

Suggested answers on page 124.