

Common Mistakes

Over the years, I've noticed that certain errors appear on student lab reports more frequently than others. Please save yourself some time (and points!) by reading through this list of common mistakes.

1. Title

- a) not descriptive: too general or too brief

2. Introduction

- a) insufficient background information
- b) extraneous, unrelated information
- c) no hypothesis given
- d) hypothesis given but not defended

3. Methods

- a) written as a list of instructions
- b) abbreviations used but not defined
- c) incomplete information

4. Results

- a) Graph is missing title, legend, axis labels, or units
- b) no text included (results should be summarized in paragraph form)
- c) text used to interpret results instead of reporting them
- d) tables of raw, unanalyzed data included

5. Discussion

- a) conclusions drawn but not interpreted/defended
- b) no connection made to original hypothesis
- c) no error analysis

6. References

- a) citation listed in references section but not cited in text
- b) website used as reference (journal articles that you find online are fine, but you should cite the original reference, not the website)
- c) incorrect citation format (either in the text itself or in the references section); please use (Author/s, year) to cite within the text
- d) lengthy quotes used in text (Science writing generally does not make use of quotations from other texts unless you are directly responding to or commenting on something that author has written. Since your lab reports will not require you to do this, avoid lengthy quotations)

7. Grammar, etc.

- a) the word "data" is plural; conjugate accordingly
- b) misuse of affect (verb)/ effect (noun)
- c) frequent grammar/spelling errors (yes, this will cause you to lose points!)