

# Writing the Introduction

Psych 191A

# Steps for Writing the Intro

- Step 1: Figure out your story
- Step 2: Tell your story
- Step 3: Step away from your story
- Step 4: Get an outside viewpoint
- Step 5: Rewrite

# Step 1: Figure out your story

- Part of science is storytelling
- What is the main question that your study is asking and why is that important?

# Which article should you write? (Bem)

Article you set out to write when you began your study...

1. Introduction
2. Methods
3. Conduct & report *planned* analyses and nothing else
4. Discussion

Article that makes the most sense in hindsight...

Explore data

Rewrite paper in light of discoveries

# Which article should you write? (Bem)

Article you set out to write when you began your study...

*Nobody cares about your mistaken assumptions!*

Article that makes the most sense in hindsight...

**Pick the best setting for your diamond!!**

## Step 2: Tell your story

1. **Pose the research question that you want to answer in an interesting way (hopefully?!)**
2. Review the prior research: Explain why you did your study / What is the important piece that it adds to what is already known?
3. Describe your study in brief
4. Describe your hypotheses

# Pose your question in an interesting way

- Want to pull the reader in
  - Anecdote
  - Example
  - Ask a question

# Examples: “Broad and sweeping”

Study: Looking at whether bad things make us more upset than good things make us happy.

“Centuries of literary efforts and religious thought have depicted human life in terms of a struggle between good and bad forces... What form does this eternal conflict take in psychology?” (Baumeister et al., 2001)



# Examples: “Broad and sweeping”

Study: Looking at the characteristics of self-regulation

“The capacity of the human organism to override, interrupt, and otherwise alter its own responses is one of the most dramatic and impressive functions of human selfhood.” (Baumeister et al., 2001)

# Examples: “This is a serious problem”

Study: Looking at how diet and exercise affect weight loss

“ Obesity is a serious public health problem in the United States. Recent estimates suggest that obesity afflicts 17% of children and adolescents aged 2-19 and 32% of adults aged 20 and older.”

# Examples: “Quotes”

*“According to most studies, people’s number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means that to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.”*

-Jerry Seinfeld, comedian

Many would agree with the notion that public speaking is frightening and some would do nearly anything to avoid it. Indeed, public speaking is often cited as people’s “number one fear.” However, in the quote above, comedian, Jerry Seinfeld, highlights one of the stranger truths about human beings—namely, that the fear of public speaking is right up there with the fear of death. How can that be possible?

# Examples: “Clear and to the point”

Study: Looking at how different people express emotions

- “Individuals differ radically from one another in the degree to which they are willing and able to express their emotions.”

Better than...

- “Previously, Ekman, Izard, and Zajonc (1980) pointed to psychology’s neglect of the affects and their expression.”

Note: Talk about the research, not the researchers

# Step 2: Tell your story

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3. Describe your study in brief
4. Describe your hypotheses

# Review previous research

General Goal: To get from your interesting question (first paragraph) to why you did your study

1. First paragraph should interest the reader but then also tell them what question you are asking (in general terms)

# The first paragraph

- Study: Does giving to others reduce physiological stress responding?
- “One of the most provocative and influential findings from health psychology is the well-established link between social relationships and health. Those with more social ties tend to fair better on a number of health outcomes and live longer than those with fewer social ties (House et al., 1988).”

# The first paragraph

- Study: Does giving to others reduce physiological stress responding?
- “One of the most provocative and influential findings from health psychology is the well-established link between social relationships and health. Those with more social ties tend to fair better on a number of health outcomes and live longer than those with fewer social ties (House et al., 1988). As part of this link, it has been theorized that having social support—the perception or experience that one is loved and cared for by others and part of a social network of mutual assistance and obligations (Wills, 1991)—is a major contributor to health. Yet, existing research on the social support-health link has tended to focus on the effects of receiving support. *Another possibility is that the act of giving support to others confers health benefits for the individual performing the giving.*”



# Review previous research

General Goal: To get from your interesting question (first paragraph) to why you did your study

1. First paragraph should interest the reader but then also tell them what question you are asking (in general terms)
2. Discuss previous research that relates to your question
3. Show that there are still questions that remain unanswered
4. Remember that you DON'T need to review everything. You are making an argument for your study

# Step 2: Tell your story

1. Pose the research question that you want to answer in an interesting way (hopefully?!)
2. Review the prior research: Explain why you did your study / What is the important piece that it adds to what is already known?
3. **Describe your study in brief**
4. **Describe your hypotheses**

### 3. Describe your study

- Should be the last paragraph
- Should flow from the studies that you presented
- Should be easy to understand without getting into a lot of detail

# 3. Describe your study

- Give the reader a sense of what you actually did:
- “To directly examine the effect of giving support to others on physiological stress responses, participants were randomly assigned to either give support to a friend in need or to complete a control condition. All participants then underwent a standardized laboratory-based stressor (Kirschbaum, Pirke, & Hellhammer, 1993). To examine physiological responses to stress, we assessed cardiovascular responses associated with sympathetic activity (heart rate, blood pressure).”

## 4. State your hypotheses

“We hypothesized that, compared to a control condition where no support was given, support giving would lead to reduced physiological responses to the stressor.”

# More General Writing Tips

- Don't "try" to sound scientific by making things complicated

Before:

"In order to query the utility of weight loss techniques, a study was initiated and fulfilled that tested the robustness of dieting and exercise on weight loss as a consequence."

After:

"To examine the effectiveness of different weight loss techniques, we investigated the effect of diet and exercise on weight loss."

Note: The sentence got shorter...

# More General Writing Tips

- Omit needless words

Before:

“Psychology is a wide field of study. At present, we regard our major strengths as lying in three broadly defined domains in which we have many faculty. The three primary areas are: Social psychology, Clinical psychology, and Developmental psychology.”

After:

“Psychology is a wide field, and our three major strengths are Social, Clinical, and Developmental psychology.”

# More General Writing Tips

- Try to avoid using the passive voice

Before:

“Based on these findings, a study examining the effect of diet and exercise on weight loss was developed.”

After:

“Based on these findings, we developed a study to examine the effect of diet and exercise on weight loss.”



# More General Writing Tips

- Use the same words to refer to the same concepts

Before:

“Men may be more expressive than women in the domain of *negative emotion*, but it is not true that they are more willing and able to display the more *cheerful affects*.”

After:

“Men may be more expressive than women in the domain of *negative emotion*, but they are not more expressive in the domain of *positive emotion*.”

# More General Writing Tips

- Be predictable (you're writing a research paper not a novel)
  - Fiction: Ideas and storylines can evolve slowly over time; it's good to keep your reader in suspense and to have plot twists
  - Research: Good writing lets readers know everything up front
    - here's the question and why
    - here's what we are testing and what we expect, etc.
    - **Rule of thumb:** mention the main point of the study in the first paragraph (or at least on the first page)

# More General Writing Tips

- Remember who your audience is
  - Assume that they are smart people but who might not know all of your terms
  - If you are using obscure terms that people don't use on a daily basis or that have a specific psychological definition, make sure to define them

# Getting started

- Write an outline
  - This can help you sketch the general logic of your argument
  - Clarifies whether each of your paragraphs flows logically from one to the next
  - Makes it easier to see where there are holes or missing parts of your argument

Your homework: Write an outline! (due to me on Veteran's Day)

## Step 3: Step away from your story

- Hard to see what is wrong with your paper when you are so close to it
- Put it down for a while and come back to it with “fresh eyes”

# Step 4: Get an outside viewpoint

- Always a good idea to have colleagues, mentors, fellow students read over your manuscripts
  - Ask for critical feedback
- Make sure your paper is in its best shape before giving it to someone
- Pay attention to what is not clear to them
- Note that their suggestions may not always tell you HOW something needs to be changed, but they will tell you THAT something needs to be changed

# Step 5: Rewrite

- Nobody (I know, at least) writes perfect first drafts
- What makes a good writer?
  - They work on their writing
  - They write a lot of drafts!

# Common myths about good writers

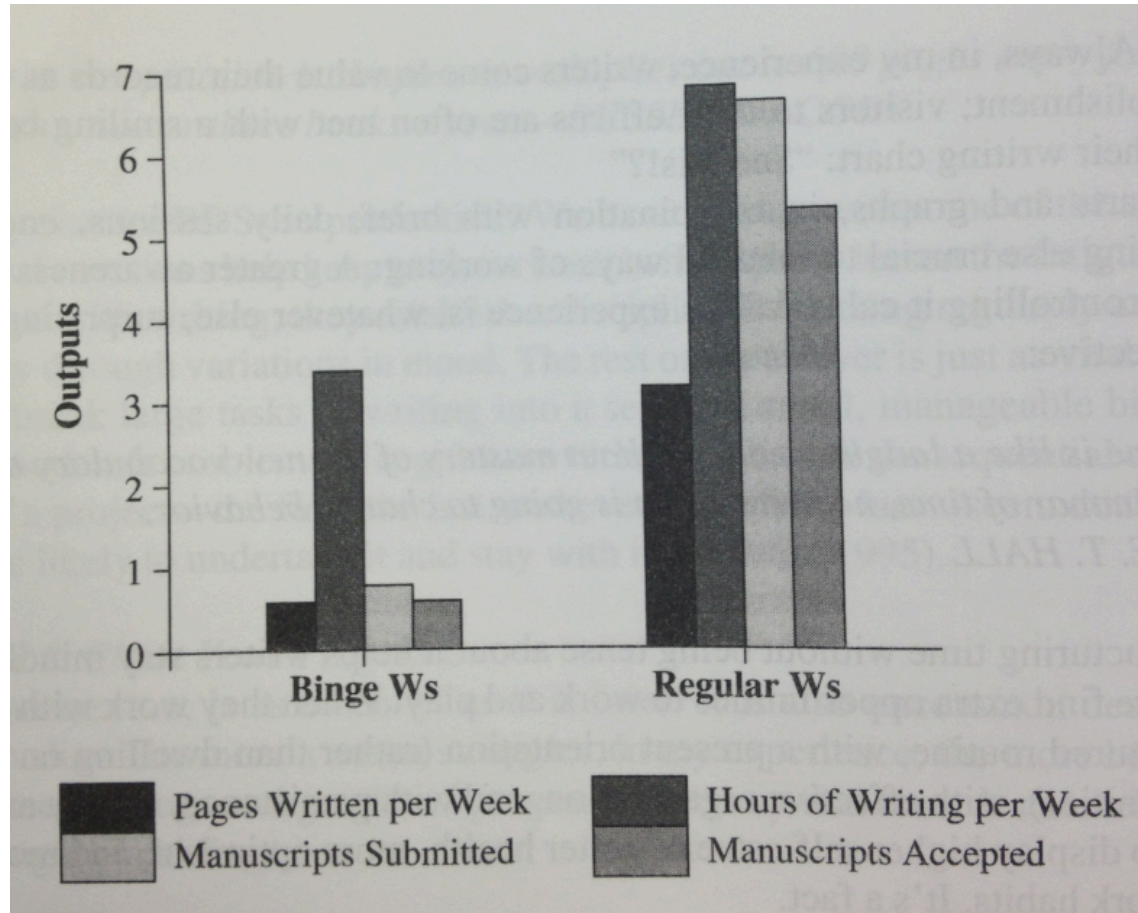
1. Good writers are born that way
  - Writing is a skill that can be practiced and learned
2. If you don't enjoy writing, you will never become a good writer
  - “If you find that writing is hard, it's because it *is* hard.”
- Good writers write perfect first drafts (i.e., only need one draft to write a paper)
  - Write it out, revise later
  - Try not to go back and revise from the beginning each time



# Common myths about good writing

1. Writing should be done in large blocks of uninterrupted time (binge writing)

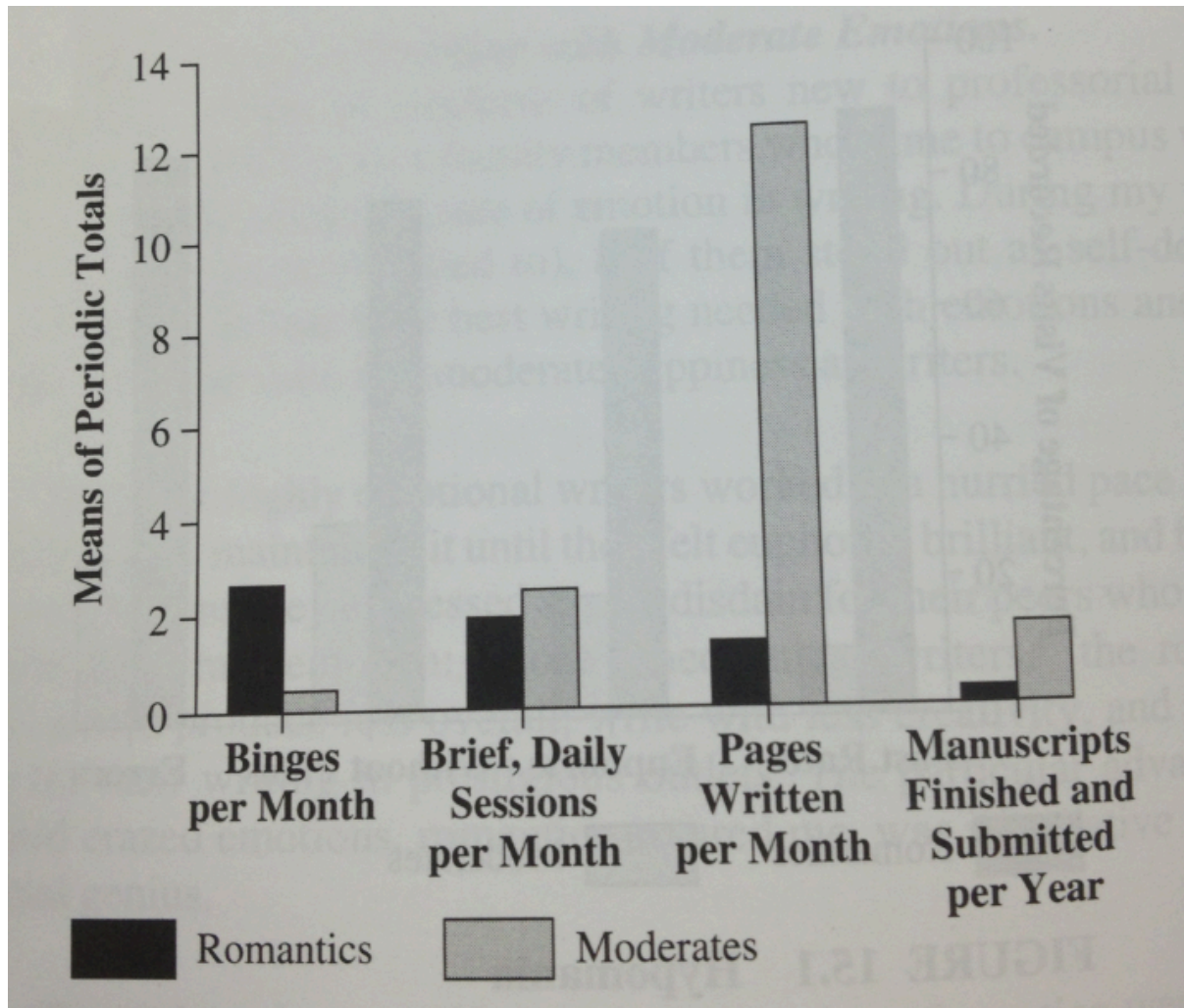
# Binge Writing vs. Regular Writing



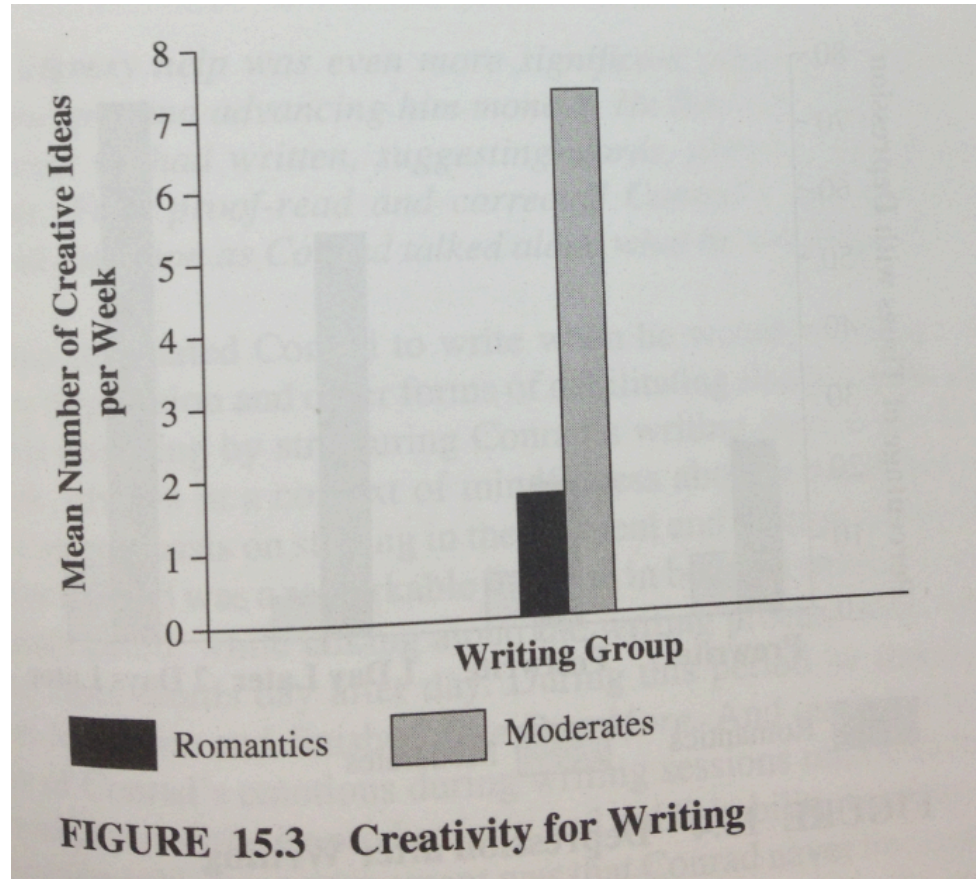
# Common myths about good writing

1. Writing should be done in large blocks of uninterrupted time (binge writing)
2. We should wait for moments of inspiration to write (need creative muses, sudden inspiration, heated emotions)

# Romantics vs. Moderates



# Romantics vs. Moderates





# Romantics vs. Moderates

