




Laboratory Report Mistakes (From *A Student Handbook for Writing in Biology*, Second Edition by Karin Knisely, ©2005 Sinauer Associates, Inc.)

MISTAKE	EXPLANATION
lc	Use lowercase letter
CAP or uc	Use capital (uppercase) letter
^	Insert text
	Leave space between the two characters
	Close up
	Start a new paragraph
Page break	End the current page; move subsequent text to next page. (In Microsoft Word and WordPerfect, press Ctrl + Enter where you want to end the page.)
agr	Subject and verb do not agree.
wc	Word choice. Word used is not appropriate for the situation.
.....	A dotted underline means "stet," or "let original text stand." The correction was made in error.
1	Word usage incorrect. Look it up in the dictionary. Examples:
a.	absorbance (how much light is absorbed) vs. absorbency (how much moisture a diaper or paper towel can hold)
b.	to bind (what atoms and molecules do) vs. to bond (what glue does)
c.	complementary (DNA strands) vs. complimentary (given free as a courtesy)
d.	data = plural of "datum"; e.g. "These data show..." <i>not</i> "This data shows..."
e.	effect (noun) vs. effect (verb meaning "to cause") vs. affect (verb meaning "to influence")
f.	conformation (3-D shape of a protein) vs. confirmation (verification)
i.	it's (it is) vs. its (belonging to "it")
m.	amount (cannot count individual pieces) vs. number (can count individual pieces)
r.	ratio (proportion or quotient) vs. ration (a fixed portion of food)
s.	strain of bacteria vs. strand of DNA
t.	then (next in time) vs. than (an expression for comparing two things)
v.	varying (changing) vs. various (different)
2	Latin names should be <i>italicized</i> .
3	Write in passive voice. Shift the emphasis from yourself to the subject of the action.
4	Punctuation usage is incorrect.
5	Sentence structure is awkward or sentence is incomplete.
6	Symbols should not be handwritten. Use the symbol font or Insert Symbol on the menu bar.
7	Superscript/Subscript. Superscript: For 10 ⁻⁵ , for example, this is done by first typing "10-5"; then highlight "-5" and either click the Superscript button on the toolbar or select Format Font from the menu bar, and click Superscript . Subscript: For K _m , for example, this is done by first typing "Km"; then highlight "m" and either click the Subscript button on the toolbar or select Format Font from the menu bar, and click Subscript .
8	Essential Abstract content is missing. Abstract must contain purpose, brief description of methods, results, and conclusions or possible explanation for the results.

9	Too much detail for Abstract.
10	Introduction needs references to provide background.
11	Introduction needs purpose of the current experiment.
12	Wrong citation format. Use either name-year or citation-sequence format. See Chapter 4 for specific examples.
13	Do not use direct quotations in scientific writing. Paraphrase and cite the source.
14	Write Materials and Methods in paragraph form. Do not make a numbered list.
15	Do not list materials separately in Materials and Methods section, unless the source is noncommercial or critical for the outcome of the experiment.
16	Time frame does not affect the outcome.
17	Do not refer to the container; instead emphasize the contents and give appropriate units of concentration.
18	Do not describe routine laboratory procedures in detail.
19	In the Materials and Methods section, do not give a "preview" of how data will be organized in the Results section.
20	Essential details are missing in the Materials and Methods section. Provide enough detail to enable the reader to repeat the experiment.
21	Do not include raw data in the Results section; instead, summarize and organize the data.
22	Results section always needs a text.
23	Describe <i>each</i> table and <i>each</i> figure individually and sequentially.
24	Refer to each figure/table parenthetically by number as you describe the results.
25	A table is not needed when the figure(s) shows the same data.
26	Each figure/table must have a number and a title.
27	The figure/table title must be self-explanatory without reference to the text.
28	Uninformative figure title. Do not use "y-axis label vs. x-axis label" as a title. See Chapter 4 for examples.
29	Figure caption goes <i>below</i> figure; table caption goes <i>above</i> table.
30	No title is needed above the figure. When you make the figure in Excel, leave the "Chart title" space blank.
31	Axis does not have proper spacing. Choose "XY Scatter" plot in Excel (see Appendix 2).
32	Each data set must have its own distinguishable symbols or lines. Choose a dark color for both the line and the symbol.
33	Use scientific notation when numbers are very large or very small.
34	Units are needed.
35	Number format is incorrect. Do not start sentences with a number (write out the number). Make sure decimal numbers less than one start with zero, e.g. 0.1 mL, <i>not</i> .1 mL.
36	Discussion section requires an explanation of the results.
37	Discussion section requires a comparison of your data to what is known from the literature. Science is not done in a vacuum!
38	Wrong reference format. See Chapter 4 for specific examples.
39	All citations in the text must be listed in the References section.
40	All references must be cited in the text.