

Methods

Method sections vary in journal articles, but rather less so than introductions. This is because the ‘moves’ in the method sections generally involve working through a series of subsections. Most method sections are usually subdivided (with subheadings) into three sections, as follows:

- 1 participants
- 2 measures
- 3 procedure(s).

If no participants are involved, then the method simply describes the measures and procedure(s). In the Slatcher and Pennebaker (2006) example, there are three subheadings in the method section: Participants, Procedure and Linguistic Analysis (or measures).

Method sections may be brief and succinct – when the methods used are well known and standardised – or quite lengthy, when the methods used are new or different and thus require careful elaboration.

Students and authors are typically instructed to write their method sections in such a way that readers can repeat the method from the descriptions given. Day and Gastel (2006, p. 64) recommend that colleagues unfamiliar with what was done should be asked to read the account to see if they can follow it. Authors are sometimes too close to what they did and thus tend to forget to mention tiny but – sometimes – key details.

A useful device for clarifying the procedure or the method for the reader – especially if it is complicated – is to summarise it in a table or figure (e.g. see Gotzsche, 2006). Figure 2.6.1 gives a schematic version of Slatcher and Pennebaker’s prose description of their method. Such procedures, though, are rarely used. None of the authors of fifty-six articles in the 2005 volume of the *Journal of Educational Psychology* used this strategy, and only two provided illustrations of the equipment used. However, eleven (i.e. twenty per cent) of these articles did include figures to illustrate either the theoretical models underlying the reasoning for their experiments or the analyses that they were going to use.

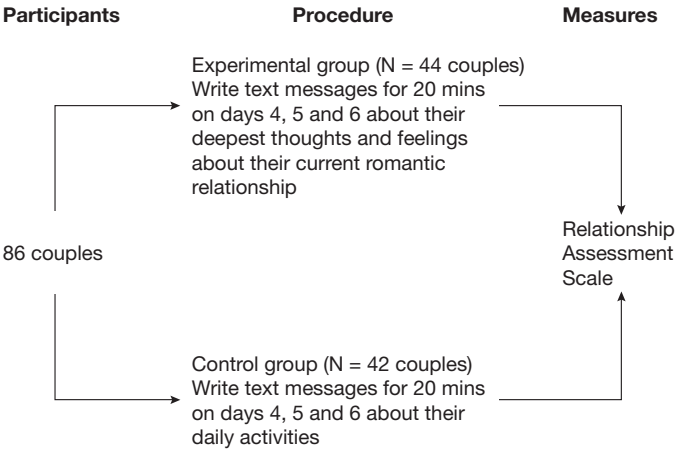


Figure 2.6.1 A schematic illustration of the prose version of the Method used in the study by Slatcher and Pennebaker (2006).

REFERENCES

Day, R. A. & Gastel, B. (2006). *How to write and publish a scientific paper* (6th edn). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gotzsche, P. C. (2006). Believability of relative risks and odds ratios in abstracts: A cross sectional study. *British Medical Journal*, 333, 231–4.

Slatcher, R. B. & Pennebaker, J. W. (2006). How do I love thee? Let me count the words. *Psychological Science*, 17(8), 660–4.

FURTHER READING

Reis, H. T. (2000). Writing effectively about design. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Guide to publishing in psychology journals* (pp. 81–97). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.