

### QGWSS Episode 3: Writing a methods section

- N: Hello and welcome back! In the last episode, we learned how to write an introduction to an IMRD text. This time we'll help you with the next section, the methods. Many of the examples come from this article. Let's remind ourselves what it's about.
- V: "Words for what? Contrasting university students' receptive and productive academic vocabulary needs"
- N: To recap, the purpose of this article is to understand the range of academic vocabulary which students need for success at university. Receptive means being able to understand words when reading or listening. Productive means being able to use words when speaking or writing. The heading can be worded in different ways. For example, this is called "Methods", and this one says "Methodology and procedures". The purpose of the methods section is to describe how the research was carried out. This helps readers judge how convincing they find the results. It also helps researchers who want to reproduce the study. The contents vary, depending on the sort of research which was carried out, but it's common to address three questions: what kind of data were used?; how were they collected?; and how were they analyzed? This article has used data from several sources and has two major subsections. The first describes an existing data set which was used. The second describes one which the researchers created, telling where they got the material, and how they collected and analyzed it. These are common objectives in a methods section, and as we saw with introductions, there are some common patterns of language which support them. First, the descriptions of what the researchers did are in the past tense.
- V: "The student postings . . . were collected manually by using various combinations of the search string."
- N: However, the descriptions of the existing resources are in the present tense.
- V: "The other non-academic sub-corpus is smaller (555,148 words) and consists of student blog posts harvested from sites with a university affiliation."
- N: They're also in the passive voice. That is, they don't mention the people who did these things. For example, it doesn't say this:
- V: "Our research assistant collected the student postings manually by using various combinations of the search string."
- N: However, sometimes the first person is used. That is, the researchers become a part of the text.
- V: "For the purposes of this investigation, we defined 'academic' as referring to contexts of formal learning, teaching and/or assessment."

- N: Whether the writers are present in the text in this way depends in part on the research tradition, and in part on personal taste. Phrases like "using" or "based on" or are used to say how things were done.
- V: “The student postings . . . were collected manually by using various combinations of the search string.”
- N: You often need to explain why the procedures you used were appropriate. In the following example, the reason is that earlier researchers had done it the same way.
- V: “In creating the Productive Academic Vocabulary List (PAVL), and in order to make it comparable to the AVL, the procedures adopted by Gardner and Davies (2014) were followed as closely as possible.”
- N: Being precise is important, so definitions or clarifications of terminology, like these, are common:
- V: “For the purposes of this investigation, we defined ‘academic’ as referring to contexts of formal learning, teaching and/or assessment.”
- N: And because the methods section describes a process, phrases which put the steps in order are used, for example:
- V: “A final step was to eliminate variations in word form which were not significant for this purpose.”
- N: So your methods section tells a story about research that you’ve carried out in the past, with emphasis on the procedures rather than the people doing them, and on making the description precise. You can find more examples of language used to do these things in the Academic Phrasebank. Hope to see you in the next episode.