

How to report a research finding

Rules for writing about a study so the reader knows what it found and what it did not.

Every finding states

- **The figure and its comparison.** "About 62% lower odds than the comparison group", never a number on its own.
- **Who and how many.** Population, size, years.
- **The design and what it cannot show.** A study that measures people at one point in time shows an association. A study that follows people over years shows a pattern over time. Neither shows that one thing caused another unless it is a trial.
- **Past tense for what was found:** "had", "showed", "reported". No "proves", "boosts" or "drives".
- **No labels for people.** Findings describe what people did, not what they are.

Words to use and avoid

Use	Avoid	Why
was linked with, went with	causes, drives, boosts	Most studies show association, not cause
had, showed, reported	proves	One study rarely settles a question
people who did X	X-type people	Describe what people did, not who they are
about 62% lower odds than the comparison group	62% less	A figure needs its comparison

Evidence grades

Grade	What it is	How it is described
1	Systematic review or meta-analysis of published studies	"Across studies..."
2	Large single study in a peer-reviewed journal	"In a study of N people..."
3	Research body or institution report	"A report by..."
4	Single-organization or non-peer-reviewed source	Not used for a finding; may be named as context