Writing a Research Report APA Style: Discussion Section

Discussion
Don’t jump to conclusions or make bold statements. Be your own devil’s advocate – look for shortcomings or inconsistencies, and anticipate the reader’s reaction to your comments. Open the discussion section with a clear statement about the answers to the questions raised in the introduction and describe support or nonsupport for your hypotheses. Describe how your findings fit existing theories and other research in the field.

In the results section, you reported the results. In the discussion section, you must explain your results. Include alternate explanations. Focus on your hypothesis and the most interesting relevant data. Be sure you include research from previous studies – whether it supports your findings or not. For example: Similar to Smith’s (2004) study… or Contrary to Smith’s (2004) study...

**After you explain your results use the following headings – in the order presented – in your discussion section.**

Limitations
All studies have limitations. Limitations are related to your methodology some may be directly related to your survey; others to the number and type of participants, and still others to your procedure.

The following are examples of limitations that might be present in your studies. This is not an exhaustive list.

Examples: My research had several limitations. This study was primarily limited by its small sample size. The sample size could have been expanded by including… An earlier start in data collection would have increased the time needed to survey more participants. More contact between the researcher and the target sample may have increased participation. Ideally, the number of participant would have been more evenly distributed across gender/year in school/athletes etc. The participants represented a narrow range of ethnicity/ages/etc. A larger sample with more diversity would have benefited our results. Including multiple colleges/groups on campus could have diversified the ethnicities/ages/etc. represented in the sample. My study would have benefited from a question regarding… Participants may have had a better understanding of survey items had a definition of… been included on the questionnaire.

Future Research
Your limitations could lead to ideas for future research. If you had no financial or time constraints, how would you have conducted your study? Think of what new items, experimental groups, or procedures you would add knowing your results? Again, this is not an exhaustive list.

Examples: A greater depth of information may have been obtained by conducting focus groups comprised of participants representative of the sample. Discussion could include one topic per focus group meeting, during which each topic area could have been the focus of discussion such as parental influence, peer influence, and self-awareness. A focus group would allow me to
conduct a group interview of participants to evaluate their attitudes, negative or positive, and to identify recommendations for the services provided to them.

**Examples:** Another possible improvement to the study could have been interviewing the participants. Personal interviews could elicit greater information regarding participants’ knowledge and attitudes. This method could have added important qualitative data and greater insight into the participants’ thoughts and opinions.

**Examples:** My methodology could have also included surveying or interviewing individuals involved with the participants. For example, family, friends, significant others, co-workers, supervisors, etc. could have been part of the study.

**Implications**
Implications are **recommendations**. Based on the results, what suggestions could you give the participants, family, friends, or society? Be sure to include the areas in which participants or others are being successful as well as areas for improvement. **Most of all be creative and helpful.** If you were helping your participants what would you want to improve? **Review the recommendations from the studies you discussed in the introduction.** Did they offer any good suggestions you could adapt to apply to your results?