

Discussion Moves

1. *Background information*. This is a somewhat free-standing move that can occur at any point in the cycle. As its name implies, this move is employed by authors when they wish to strengthen their discussion by recapitulating main points, by highlighting theoretical information, or by reminding the reader of technical information.
2. *Statement of results*. If there is a quasi-obligatory move in Discussion sections it is this one. Evidence suggests, as we might expect, that it is the starting point of a cycle – and is only likely to be preceded by a Move 1. Many Discussion sections will have several cycles beginning with a Move 2; Hopkins (1985) found that three cycles were the commonest pattern in his study of papers published in the proceedings of an irrigation and drainage conference. Additionally, we might expect that the stronger results will be dealt with in an early cycle and weaker results in a later one. On this issue, Huckin (1987) makes the following interesting observation:

One of my biologists, who serves on the editorial board of a major journal in the field, said that the first paragraph of a discussion should always be reserved for the strongest claim in the study. Though he stated this as a prescription, my survey of papers in both biology and physics showed it to be a description of actual practice anyway.

(Huckin, 1987:12–13)
3. *(Un)expected outcome*. Here the writer comments on whether the result is unexpected or not. This was, in fact, quite a rare move in Peng's chemical engineering texts, occurring in only four out of 52 cycles.
4. *Reference to previous research*. After Moves 1 and 2, probably the most common move. There are two main sub-types or steps: reference for purposes of *comparison* with present research and references for purposes of providing *support* for present research.
5. *Explanation*. This move is particularly common when the writer suggests reasons for a surprising result, or one at odds with those reported in the literature. At present the relationship between Moves 3 and 5 is somewhat obscure, particularly as to whether 5 is subsequent to 3 or an alternative to it.
6. *Exemplification*. Examples are most often used to support an explanation (Hopkins and Dudley-Evans, 1988).
7. *Deduction and Hypothesis*. This move is used to make a claim (however qualified) about the generalizability of some or all of the reported results.
8. *Recommendation*. The writer advocates the need for further research or makes suggestions about possible lines of future investigation. However, Huckin (personal communication) believes that the specific identification of interesting research questions at the end of a cycle or at the end of the Discussion section as a whole is a move being increasingly abandoned by US scientists because they do not wish to give advantage to others in an increasingly competitive market for research grants.