The Discussion Section – Interpreting Results and Linking to Theory

Course: English for Research and Thesis Writing (UEF 2.1) **Target:** 1st Year Master's Students (Economics & Management)

1. The Purpose of the Discussion

While the *Results* section tells the reader **what** happened, the *Discussion* section explains **why** it happened and **what it means**. It bridges the gap between your data and the literature review you wrote in Week 3.

The "Reverse Funnel" Structure:

1. **Summary:** Briefly restate your main finding (without using too many numbers).
2. **Interpretation:** Explain why you think you got these results.
3. **Comparison:** Compare your results with previous studies (Do they agree or disagree?).
4. **Implications:** How does this affect the field of Economics or Management?
5. **Limitations:** Acknowledge the weaknesses of your study.

2. Linking Results to Previous Research

You must use your findings to "talk" to the authors you cited in your Literature Review.

Relationship	Useful Phrases
Consistency	"These findings are **consistent with** the research of Abidi (2021)..."
Agreement	"This result **supports the theory** that inflation reduces investment."
Contradiction	"**In contrast to** Mansouri (2022), this study found no evidence of..."
New Finding	"This study **differs from** previous research by identifying X as a factor."

3. The Language of "Hedging" (Caution)

In Academic English, you should rarely say something is 100% "proven." Instead, use cautious language to protect yourself from criticism.
- **Avoid:** "This **proves** that small businesses are failing."
- **Use:** "This **suggests** that small businesses **may be** struggling."

Common Hedging Verbs and Modals:

- **Verbs:** *suggest, indicate, appear to, seem to, tend to.*
- **Modals:** *might, could, would, may.*

- **Adverbs:** *likely, possibly, potentially, partially.*

4. Explaining Unexpected Results

If your data did not support your hypothesis, you must explain why objectively.
- **Template:** "A possible explanation for this unexpected result is..."
- **Example:** "A possible explanation for the lack of correlation **could be** the small sample size used in the study."
- **Template:** "This discrepancy may be attributed to..."

5. Practical Exercise: Interpreting a Result

Result: Your study found that workers in Constantine are more productive when working from home, but Smith (2019) found they were less productive.
Task: Write a short paragraph interpreting this, using "Hedging" and "Comparison" language.
Model Answer:
"The findings indicate that remote work **appears to** enhance productivity among employees in Constantine. This result **stands in contrast to** Smith (2019), who argued that remote environments lead to decreased efficiency. This discrepancy **may be attributed to** the improved digital infrastructure available in the local context compared to the period of Smith's study."

6. Self-Check: Discussion Section

- [ ] Did I start by restating the main findings?
- [ ] Did I compare my results with at least 2 or 3 other authors?
- [ ] Did I use "Hedging" language (e.g., *suggests, likely*) instead of being too certain?
- [ ] Did I explain **why** my results occurred?
- [ ] Did I mention the **limitations** (e.g., sample size, time constraints)?