

How to use CONSORT 2025 when reporting trial results

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You're ready to write about the results of your trial, maybe for a journal article or maybe for a conference. How can CONSORT help make your job easier?

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In this video, we'll tell you

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what CONSORT is,

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why you might want to use it,

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and how to use it.

What CONSORT is

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CONSORT is a reporting guideline.

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Reporting guidelines are a list of minimum items that a person needs to fully understand your trial.

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They tend to be given as checklists or structured text listing the information.

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There are lots of reporting guidelines, each for a specific study type.

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CONSORT is the reporting guideline for reporting the results of a randomised controlled trial.

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If you're working with other study designs, visit the EQUATOR network for help in finding an appropriate reporting guideline.

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The CONSORT statement is a document with 30 items. In the actual checklist, each item is given a line or two of description.

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For example, item two, trial registration, is the name of trial registry, identifying number with URL, and date of registration.

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These thirty items follow the structure of an article covering: 4 items on open science declarations, 2 items for the introduction,

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14 items for the methods,

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7 items for the results,

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and 2 items for the discussion.

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So CONSORT focuses much more on the methods and results - the things you did and found - than anything else.

Why researchers use CONSORT

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You might be wondering

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why you need this checklist.

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There's a few reasons why these checklists can be helpful.

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CONSORT was created by groups of people who work with clinical trials and their results like trialists, statisticians, systematic reviewers, healthcare professionals, patients, and funders.

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As journal editors helped shape CONSORT,

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following it means your work will meet their requirements for reporting quality, making it more likely that editors will accept your work.

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As peer reviewers were involved,

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having a manuscript that is complete will also make your peer review experience much easier.

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Peer reviewers will have the information they need to judge your work on the first round of peer review, so you won't waste their time and yours.

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You're also showing them that you know what is needed in the field - that you understand the standards.

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Once your work is published, CONSORT will carry on helping you.

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Using CONSORT means that you will have listed the information that patients, policymakers,

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systematic reviewers, and healthcare professionals need to understand and use your trial's results.

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If this information is missing, they end up having to contact authors.

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Using CONSORT means you won't have to answer lots of emails or calls about your published article from people wanting to know just what it was that you did.

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When these readers have the information they need,

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your work will actually get used in positive ways.

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Patients can understand their healthcare options.

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Policymakers can include your work in their practise guidance.

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Systematic reviewers can include your work in reviews and meta-analyses,

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and healthcare professionals can use your work to inform their clinical practise.

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Your research will have impact.

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There's even evidence that suggests that journal articles that follow reporting guidelines and journals that endorse reporting guidelines get more citations than ones that don't.

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You might be thinking that these are all great reasons for making sure you add all the right details to your paper. But why do you need CONSORT?

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CONSORT can make the writing process easier for you.

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It's tricky to keep in mind all of the elements that all of your diverse readers will need.

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It's a bit like when you go shopping. You might remember the 10 things you need,

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but why not make your life easier by writing them all down?

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CONSORT tells you exactly what information you need to add to your methods and results. That's fewer decisions for you

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and more time to spend on other parts of the article.

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There are some common worries and misconceptions about using CONSORT.

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Sometimes people worry that using CONSORT will make that article sound exactly the same as everyone else's article, and that their creativity will be stifled.

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But CONSORT focuses on methods and results. There isn't much creativity in describing exactly what you did.

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It's like when you read a recipe. When you read a list of ingredients on the methods, you just need all the steps laid out in a way that you can follow.

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CONSORT says little about the introduction and discussion, leaving you to include whatever detail makes sense for your work.

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CONSORT also doesn't tell you *how* to write about each item.

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You can use the words and style that make the most sense to you.

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CONSORT doesn't tell you the order that information has to be in, although it does suggest which information readers would prefer to see in the methods or in the results.

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You can use CONSORT to write articles for any journal that accepts trials.

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You will always be able to follow CONSORT *and* the journal's instructions.

How to use CONSORT when writing

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How exactly do you use CONSORT to help make writing easier?

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You could look at CONSORT when you are planning your paper.

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You could check which information you'll need and make sure you've got it.

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You might need to contact a team member for some information. Make sure everyone on the team has a copy of CONSORT.

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You could use CONSORT as a writing template to make an outline for the paper.

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Start by adding the headings that your target journal asks for to your document, like the Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion.

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Then add each item in CONSORT as a sub heading under the appropriate section.

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The example on the screen just shows a few of the CONSORT headings.

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You can also add your own sub-headings for the ideas that you want to convey that are covered by CONSORT.

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CONSORT is a minimum list of essential items for writing about trial results.

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If there are more details that a reader needs about something CONSORT doesn't mention,

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then add them in.

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You might come across an item where you're not sure what CONSORT means, or you'd like to see an example of how to add that information.

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The CONSORT Explanation and Elaboration paper explains why each item is important and described any nuance or challenges that you might like to think about.

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It also gives examples for each checklist item. This E&E document is really helpful as a reference to dip into when you need it. You can download it on our website.

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Remember, readers should never have to assume what you did.

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You might be worrying about how you fit all of these items into a standard journal article's word count.

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Start by getting all the information down.

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During the editing stage, we can sometimes combine items and shorten our writing. For instance,

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item 17 asks for how the randomization sequence was created.

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We could say, “a statistician generated the 1:1 randomization list using Stata 13.0.”

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Item 19 asks how randomisation was implemented. We could say, “when new participants joined the trial, the pharmacist dispensed the active or placebo tablet according to the randomisation list.”

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Item 18 asks how the sequence was kept a secret to maintain blinding. We could add that the statistician and pharmacists were “independent” of the trial team

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and item 20 asks about blinding. We can state that, “participants, research nurses and outcome assessors were blinded to allocation group and that the active and placebo tablets had identical colour, weight, taste and smell.”

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If you use CONSORT to help guide your writing, it is good practise to say so. In your methods section, state that this paper was reported following the CONSORT reporting guideline and then cite the version that you used.

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Be careful not to say that the study was *conducted* following a reporting guideline. These guidance documents just tell you what decisions to write about. They don't tell you what the right decision is each time.

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Always say *reported*.

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Citing CONSORT shows your peer reviewers and readers that you are following good research practises.

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It also helps to educate readers about reporting guidelines so that more people will use them.

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You might have seen that item 22 asks for a flow diagram.

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CONSORT includes a flow diagram template that you could use for your first results figure.

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The flow diagram shows exactly what happened with all the participants in the trial.

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You can also use consult to do a last check for the manuscript once you're happy with the text. Sometimes when lots of people are writing an article together and making lots of changes, important information gets lost.

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Do a last check to make sure everything is there.

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Some journals will also ask you to submit a completed checklist alongside the manuscript.

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You can download an editable checklist on our website. Next to each item, write which page of the draft that information can be found on.

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We've covered five times that CONSORT can be useful.

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You might be thinking that we could use CONSORT even earlier when planning the trial. SPIRIT is the companion reporting guideline for writing up your trial protocol. You can find out more

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about SPIRIT on our website.

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This is the end of this training video on what CONSORT is,

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why CONSORT is useful for authors, and how to use CONSORT when writing.

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The 2025 update of SPIRIT and CONSORT was funded by the MRC NIHR.

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Thank you for using CONSORT to make sure your article includes all the important information that readers need. By building a better evidence based today, we're ensuring better quality research in the future.