The IMRAD Format: What goes where?  
(IMRAD = Introduction, Methods, Research and Discussion)

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| Abstract         | Mini-version of the paper                    | Simple past - refers to work done               | ✓ Principal objectives  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Methods used  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Principal results  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Main conclusions |
| Introduction     | Provides rationale for the study             | Present — refers to established knowledge in the literature | ✓ Nature and scope of problem  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Review of relevant literature  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Your hypothesis  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Your approach used in this study  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ (justification for this approach)  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Principal results  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Main conclusions |
| Methods & Materials | Describes what was done -- experiment, model, or field study | Simple past - refers to work done | ✓ Description of materials  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Description of procedure in a logical order, e.g., chronological order or by experiment  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Sufficient detail so that procedure can be reproduced |
| Results          | Presents the data, the facts -- what you found, calculated, discovered, observed | Simple past - refers to what was found, observed | ✓ Your results  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Your observations during experiments/field work  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Your observations about the results (e.g., compare and contrast between experiments/model runs)  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Results of any calculations using the data, like rates or error |
| Discussion       | • Shows the relationships among the facts  
|                  | • Puts your results in context of previous research | Present - emphasis on established knowledge, present results | ✓ Trends, relationships, generalizations shown by the results  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Any exceptions, outlying data (and WHY)  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ How your results agree/disagree with previous studies and WHY |
| Conclusions      | Summarizes your principal findings           | Present - emphasis on what should now be accepted as established knowledge | ✓ Conclusions should relate back to the introduction, the hypothesis  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Summary of evidence supporting each conclusion  
|                  |                                              |                                                | ✓ Implications, the significance of your results or any practical applications |

Once your outline is finished, it's simply a matter of turning your ideas into complete sentences.