

HOW TO WRITE A RESEARCH ABSTRACT

Research abstracts are used throughout the research community to provide a concise description about a research project. It is typically a short summary of your completed research. If done well, it makes the reader want to learn more about your research. Some students present their research findings at local and national conferences. Research abstracts are usually requested as part of the application process for conference presenters. These are the basic components of an abstract in any discipline:

- 1) Motivation/problem statement:** Why do we care about the problem? What practical, scientific, theoretical or artistic gap is your research filling?
- 2) Methods/procedure/approach:** What did you actually do to get your results? (e.g. analyzed 3 novels, completed a series of 5 oil paintings, interviewed 17 students)
- 3) Results/findings/product:** As a result of completing the above procedure, what did you learn/invent/create?
- 4) Conclusion/implications:** What are the larger implications of your findings, especially for the problem/gap identified in step 1?

However, it's important to note that the weight accorded to the different components can vary by discipline. For models, try to find abstracts of research that is similar to your research.

Qualities of a Good Abstract

- Well developed paragraphs are unified, coherent, concise, and able to stand alone
- Uses an introduction/body/conclusion structure which presents the article, paper, or report's purpose, results, conclusions, and recommendations in that order
- Follows strictly the chronology of the article, paper, or report
- Provides logical connections (or transitions) between the information included
- Adds no new information, but simply summarizes the report
- Is understandable to a wide audience
- Oftentimes uses passive verbs to downplay the author and emphasize the information

Steps to Writing Effective Abstracts

Reread the article, paper, or report with the goal of abstracting in mind. Look specifically for these main parts of the article, paper, or report: purpose, methods, scope, results, conclusions, and recommendation. If you're writing an abstract about another person's article, paper, or report, the introduction and the summary are good places to begin. These areas generally cover what the article emphasizes. After you've finished rereading the article, paper, or report, write a rough draft without looking back at what you're abstracting. Don't merely copy key sentences from the article, paper, or report: you'll put in too much or too little information. Don't rely on the way material was phrased in the article, paper, or report: summarize information in a new way.

Don'ts

- Do not commence with "this paper...", "this report..." or similar. It is better to write about the research than about the paper.

- Do not explain the sections or parts of the paper.
- Avoid sentences that end in "...is described", "...is reported", "...is analyzed" or similar.
- Do not begin sentences with "it is suggested that..." "it is believed that...", "it is felt that..." or similar. In every case, the four words can be omitted without damaging the essential message.
- Do not repeat or rephrase the title.
- Do not refer in the abstract to information that is not in the document.
- If possible, avoid trade names, acronyms, abbreviations, or symbols. You would need to explain them, and that takes too much room.

The abstract should be about the research, not about the act of writing.

Where to Find Examples of Abstracts:

- The best source of example abstracts is journal articles. Go to the library and look at biology journals, or look at electronic journals on the web.
- Read the abstract; read the article. Pick the best ones, the examples where the abstract makes the article easier to read, and figure out how they do it.
- Not everyone writes good abstracts, even in refereed journals, but the more abstracts you read, the easier it is to spot the good ones.