

HOW TO WRITE AN ABSTRACT

If you need to write an abstract for an academic or scientific paper, don't panic! Your abstract is simply a short summary of the work or paper that others can use as an overview. An abstract describes what you do in your essay, whether it's a scientific experiment or a literary analysis paper. It should help your reader understand the paper and help people searching for this paper decide whether it suits their purposes prior to reading. To write an abstract, finish your paper first, then type a summary that identifies the purpose, problem, methods, results, and conclusion of your work. After you get the details down, all that's left is to format it correctly. Since an abstract is only a summary of the work you've already done, it's easy to accomplish!

1. Getting Your Abstract Started

Write your paper first. Even though an abstract goes at the beginning of the work, it acts as a summary of your entire paper. It will be an overview of everything you write about in your paper. Save writing your abstract for last, after you have already finished your paper.

Review and understand any requirements for writing your abstract. Before you start writing, refer to the guidelines to identify important issues to keep in mind.

- Is there a maximum or minimum length?
- Are there style requirements?
- Are you writing for an instructor or a publication?

Consider your audience. Abstracts are written to help readers find your work. Abstracts also help your readers get at your main argument quickly. Keep the needs of your readers in mind as you write the abstract.

- Will other academics in your field read this abstract?
- Should it be accessible to a lay reader or somebody from another field?

Determine the type of abstract you must write: descriptive, informative or critical.

- **Descriptive abstracts** explain the purpose, goal, and methods of your research but leave out the results section. These are typically only 100-200 words.
- **Informative abstracts** are like a condensed version of your paper, giving an overview of everything in your research including the results. It is much longer than a descriptive one
- **A critical abstract** accomplishes the same goals as the other types of abstract, but will also relate the study or work being discussed to the writer's own research.

2 Writing Your Abstract

Identify your purpose. The reader wants to know why your research is important, and what the purpose of it is. Start off your descriptive abstract by considering the following questions:

- Why did you decide to do this study or project?
- How did you conduct your research?
- What did you find?
- Why is this research and your findings important?
- Why should someone read your entire essay?

Explain the problem at hand. Abstracts state the “problem” behind your work.

- What problem is your research trying to better understand or solve?
- What is the scope of your study - a general problem, or something specific?
- What is your main claim or argument?

Explain your methods. Now is the part where you give an overview of how you accomplished your study. If you did your own work, include a description of it here. If you reviewed the work of others, it can be briefly explained.

- Discuss your own research including the variables and your approach.
- Describe the evidence you have to support your claim.
- Give an overview of your most important sources.

Describe your results. What is it that you found?

- What answer did you reach from your research or study?
- Was your hypothesis or argument supported?
- What are the general findings?

Give your conclusion. This should finish up your summary and give closure to your abstract. In it, address the following questions in an informative abstract:

- What are the implications of your work?
- Are your results general or very specific?

3 Formatting Your Abstract

Keep it in order. There are specific questions your abstract must provide answers for, but the answers must be kept in order as well. Ideally, it should mimic the overall format of your essay, with a general ‘introduction,’ ‘body,’ and ‘conclusion.’

Provide helpful information. An abstract should provide a helpful explanation of your paper and your research. Word your abstract so that the reader knows exactly what you’re talking about, and isn’t left hanging with ambiguous references or phrases.

Write it from scratch. Your abstract is a summary, yes, but it should be written completely separate from your paper. Don’t copy and paste direct quotes from yourself, and avoid simply paraphrasing your own sentences from elsewhere in your writing. Write your abstract using completely new vocabulary and phrases to keep it interesting and redundancy-free.

Use key phrases and words. If your abstract is to be published in a journal, you want people to be able to find it easily. Try to use 5-10 important words or phrases key to your research in your abstract.

For example, if you’re writing a paper on the cultural differences in perceptions of schizophrenia, be sure to use words like “schizophrenia,” “cross-

cultural,” “culture-bound,” “mental illness,” and “societal acceptance.” These might be search terms people use when looking for a paper on your subject.

Use real information. Do not reference ideas or studies that you don't include in your paper in order to do this. Citing material that you don't use in your work will mislead readers and ultimately lower your viewership.

Get feedback from someone. Having someone else read your abstract is a great way for you to know whether you've summarized your research well. Try to find someone who doesn't know everything about your project. Ask him or her to read your abstract and then tell you what s/he understood from it. This will let you know whether you've adequately communicated your key points in a clear manner.

Task 1. From the list below tick (✓) all an abstract is:

<input type="checkbox"/>	a short summary of the work or paper that others can use as an overview
<input type="checkbox"/>	a summary that identifies the purpose, problem, methods, results, and conclusion of your work
<input type="checkbox"/>	a summary of the work you've already done
<input type="checkbox"/>	description of what you do in your essay
<input type="checkbox"/>	all of the above
<input type="checkbox"/>	none of the above

Task 2. Put the stages of writing an abstract in chronological order.

1. a) review and understand any requirements for writing your abstract
2. b) explain your methods
3. c) give your conclusion
4. d) identify your purpose
5. e) get feedback from someone
6. f) refer to the guidelines to identify important issues

