

'How to write an abstract'

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An abstract is a self-contained, short, and powerful statement that describes a larger work. An abstract of a humanities work may contain the thesis, background, and conclusion of the larger work.

An abstract is not a review, nor does it evaluate the work being abstracted. While it contains key words found in the larger work, the abstract is an original document rather than an excerpted passage. The majority of abstracts are informative. While they still do not critique or evaluate a work, they do more than describe it. A good informative abstract acts as a surrogate for the work itself. That is, the writer presents and explains all the main arguments and the important results and evidence in the complete article/paper/book. An informative abstract includes the information that can be found in a descriptive abstract (purpose, methods, scope) but also includes the results and conclusions of the research and the recommendations of the author. The length varies according to discipline, but an informative abstract is rarely more than 10% of the length of the entire work. In the case of a longer work, it may be much less.

Reason for writing:

What is the importance of the research? Why would a reader be interested in the larger work?

Problem:

What problem does this work attempt to solve? What is the scope of the project?
What is the main argument/thesis/claim?

Methodology:

An abstract of a scientific work may include specific models or approaches used in the larger study. Other abstracts may describe the types of evidence used in the research.

Results:

Again, an abstract of a scientific work may include specific data that indicates the

results of the project. Other abstracts may discuss the findings in a more general way. *Implications:*

What changes should be implemented as a result of the findings of the work? How does this work add to the body of knowledge on the topic?

All abstracts include:

1. The full citation of the source preceding the abstract.
2. The most important information first.
3. The same level of language found in the original, including technical language.
4. Key words and phrases that quickly identify the content and focus of the work.
5. Clear, concise, and powerful language.

Abstracts may include:

1. The thesis of the work in the first sentence.
2. The background that places the work in the larger body of literature.
3. The same chronological structure of the original work.

How not to write a abstract:

1. Do not refer extensively to other works.
2. Do not add information not contained in the original work.
3. Do not define terms.

Identify key terms:

Search through the entire document for key terms that identify the purpose, scope, and methods of the work. Pay close attention to the Introduction (or Purpose) and the Conclusion (or Discussion). These sections should contain all the main ideas and key terms in the paper. When writing the abstract be sure to incorporate the key terms.

Highlight key phrases and sentences:

Instead of cutting and pasting the actual words, try highlighting sentences or phrases that appear to be central to the work. Then, in a separate document, re-write the sentences and phrases in your own words.

Don't look back:

After reading the entire work, put it aside and write a paragraph about the work without referring to it. In the first draft you may not remember all the key terms or the results, but you will remember what the main point of the work was. Remember not to include any information you did not get from the work being abstracted.

What the dissertation does.

How the dissertation does it.

What materials are used.

Conclusion.

Keywords.