

Writing an Abstract for an Article, Proposal or Report

What is an abstract?

An abstract is a condensed version of a longer piece of writing that highlights the major points covered, concisely describes the content and scope of the writing, and reviews the writing's contents in abbreviated form. Abstracts are typically 100 to 250 words and follow set patterns.

Why is an abstract so important?

- Help readers decide if they should read an entire article
- Help readers and researchers remember key findings on a topic
- Help readers understand the text by outlining key points prior to reading the full document
- Index articles for quick recovery and cross-referencing

What are the key elements that should be included?

- Background: A simple opening sentence or two placing the work in context.
- Aims: One or two sentences giving the purpose of the work.
- Method(s): One or two sentences explaining what was (or will) be done.
- Results: One or two sentences indicating the main findings (or what you hope to accomplish with the project).
- Conclusions: One sentence giving the most important consequence of the work – what do the results mean? How will they be used?

Questions an abstract should answer:

- Why did you do this study or project? (Or why are you undertaking the project/study?)
- What did you do, and how? (What will you do? How?)
- What did you find? (What do you expect to find?)
- What do the findings mean?

Helpful tips when writing an abstract:

- Reread your article or proposal with the goal of abstracting in mind.
 - Look specifically for these main parts of the article or proposal: purpose, methods, scope, results, conclusions and recommendations.
 - Use the headings and table of contents as a guide to writing your abstract.
- After you've finished rereading the article or proposal, write a rough draft without looking back at what you're abstracting.
 - Don't merely copy key sentences – you'll put in too much or too little information.
 - Don't rely on the way material was phrased – summarize information in a new way.
- Revise your rough draft to:
 - Correct weaknesses in organization
 - Improve transitions from point to point
 - Drop unnecessary information
 - Make sure it is complete and accurate
 - Eliminate wordiness
 - Fix errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation
 - Make sure it's written in the same voice as the paper