How to Write an Abstract

The abstract is your chance to let your readers know what they can expect from your article. Learn how to write a clear, and concise abstract that will keep your audience reading.

How your abstract impacts editorial evaluation and future readership

After the title, the abstract is the second-most-read part of your article. A good abstract can help to expedite peer review and, if your article is accepted for publication, it's an important tool for readers to find and evaluate your work. Editors use your abstract when they first assess your article. Prospective reviewers see it when they decide whether to accept an invitation to review. Once published, the abstract gets indexed in PubMed and Google Scholar, as well as library systems and other popular databases. Like the title, your abstract influences keyword search results. Readers will use it to decide whether to read the rest of your article. Other researchers will use it to evaluate your work for inclusion in systematic reviews and meta-analysis. It should be a concise standalone piece that accurately represents your research.

Impact and attraction

TITLE

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Full Article

What to include in an abstract

The main challenge you'll face when writing your abstract is keeping it concise *AND* fitting in all the information you need. Depending on your subject area the journal may require a structured abstract following specific headings. A structured abstract helps your readers understand your study more easily. If your journal doesn't require a structured abstract it's still a good idea to follow a similar format, just present the abstract as one paragraph without headings.

Background or **Introduction – What is currently known?**
Start with a brief, 2 or 3 sentence, introduction to the research area.

Objectives or **Aims – What is the study and why did you do it?**
Clearly state the research question you're trying to answer.

Methods – What did you do?
Explain what you did and how you did it. Include important information about your methods, but avoid the low-level specifics. Some disciplines have specific requirements for abstract methods.

- CONSORT for randomized trials.
- STROBE for observational studies
- PRISMA for systematic reviews and meta-analyses

Results – What did you find?
Briefly give the key findings of your study. Include key numeric data (including confidence intervals or p values), where possible.

Conclusions – What did you conclude?
Tell the reader why your findings matter, and what this could mean for the 'bigger picture' of this area of research.

Writing tips: The main challenge you may find when writing your abstract is keeping it concise *AND* covering all the information you need to.

Do

- Keep it concise and to the point. Most journals have a maximum word count, so check guidelines before you write the abstract to save time editing it later.
- Write for your audience. Are they specialists in your specific field? Are they cross-disciplinary? Are they non-specialists? If you're writing for a general audience, or your research could be of interest to the public keep your language as straightforward as possible. If you're writing in English, do remember that not all of your readers will necessarily be native English speakers.
- Focus on key results, conclusions and take home messages.
- Write your paper first, then create the abstract as a summary.
- Check the journal requirements before you write your abstract, eg. required subheadings.
- Include keywords or phrases to help readers search for your work in indexing databases like PubMed or Google Scholar.
- Double and triple check your abstract for spelling and grammar errors. These kind of errors can give potential reviewers the impression that your research isn't sound, and can make it easier to find reviewers who accept the invitation to review your manuscript.Your abstract should be a taste of what is to come in the rest of your article.

Don't

- Sensationalize your research.
- Speculate about where this research might lead in the future.
- Use abbreviations or acronyms (unless absolutely necessary or unless they're widely known, eg. DNA).
- Repeat yourself unnecessarily, eg. "Methods: We used X technique.Results: Using X technique, we found…"
- Contradict anything in the rest of your manuscript.
- Include content that isn't also covered in the main manuscript.
- Include citations or references.