

University Writing Center



APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY®

Abstracts

An abstract is a single paragraph that summarizes a paper. Abstracts precede articles in scholarly journals or indexes of dissertations, and they provide readers with brief summaries that enable them to judge *quickly* whether an article is relevant to their own research. Usually containing about 250 words, abstracts follow specific formats determined by the discipline, the department, or the journal where they will be published.

Reading abstracts from scholarly journals in a specific discipline allows a writer to become familiar with the format. This reading will be very helpful before you begin to write an abstract of your own. Be sure to follow the guidelines for publication of your work; different disciplines, or even different journals within disciplines, will have different requirements. Some abstracts, for example, include a list of important keywords at the bottom as an additional way to help readers decide whether to read the entire article.

STEM field abstracts generally replicate the structure of scientific papers: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion. Each of these can be summarized in one to three sentences. The abstract will explain the writer's purpose, the problem or issue addressed, how the research was conducted, and what was found. A conclusion then explains the significance of the results.

In the humanities and some social sciences, abstracts provide a summary of the content as well as some contextual information about where this knowledge fits into the discourse of the field. It should contain the basics of the thesis, the approach, and what conclusion the author came to. Some instructors may ask for specific elements to be included, so always follow their directions.

Steps to Writing an Abstract

- Write the paper first. It is difficult to write an abstract until a paper is done.
 - In some instances, publishers will ask for an abstract as a proposal for a work you have not yet written. Do your best to be thorough.
- Provide context for the research.
 - Why was this research conducted?
 - Was something missing from other research?
- Explain the problem.
 - What was the main goal or hypothesis going in?
- Describe the methods used to investigate the problem.
 - What evidence was gathered?
 - How was the information collected?
 - Is the research original?
 - Does this study incorporate other research (meta-analysis)?

- Does this study build on other research?
- Report the results.
 - What was discovered?
 - How did you back up your thesis?
- Write a conclusion.
 - What are the implications of the research?
 - What should readers take away with them?

Finally, do not start sentences with “This essay will examine ...” or “In this research paper I will attempt to prove ...” An abstract must be brief, so get right to the explanation of what the paper actually does.

Information for this handout was gathered from these sources:

<https://www.wikihow.com/Write-an-Abstract>

<https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/writing-an-abstract>

<https://www.editage.com/insights/how-to-write-the-abstract-for-a-social-sciences-or-humanities-paper>

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