

How to Write an Abstract

An abstract is used in academic writing as a concise description of your paper and to entice readers to read the whole paper. It is particularly used within journal article writing to assist researchers/scholars to quickly assess the outline of the article and whether it is relevant or worth their time in reading it.

An abstract should be a stand alone summary of your paper. It must be a fully self-contained, capsule description of the paper. It must make sense all by itself without the reader having to read the rest of your paper.

An abstract usually contains the following aspects:

- Problem statement – what is the purpose of the paper, what are you trying to solve or what is your main argument that you are addressing?
- Approach - how did you go about solving the problem? Did you use a certain methodology?
- Results - what did you discover in your paper or what were the main key themes?
- Conclusion – what did you conclude overall? What are the implications of your conclusion?

- An abstract should not be more than 10% of the word count of your paper. An abstract of 150-300 words is ideal.

Abstract versus Introduction

Remember that an abstract is very different in its purpose compared to an introduction. An introduction poses the initial questions that will guide your inquiry and state the intentions of writing for the main body of the essay. Whereas an abstract briefly states the purpose of the paper as well as discusses what was concluded in your paper. An introduction does not discuss any conclusive thoughts.

The best source of example abstracts is journal articles. Go look at some journal articles, read the abstract and then read the article, note how the abstract condenses the information discussed in the article.

What not to do in an abstract:

- An abstract should not repeat word for word what you have written either in your introduction or conclusion.
- An abstract should not refer to other works
- An abstract should not define terms
- An abstract should not add information that is not contained in your paper
- An abstract should not be vague, general or highly descriptive; instead it should be very tight, succinct and clear.

Further tips:

- An abstract is **not** included in the word count.
- Write your abstract last. That way you know what your paper aimed to do, what you discovered and finally what you concluded.
- Enjoy!