Abstracts

An abstract is a brief, <u>stand-alone document</u> stating the essential information of a larger scholarly work (paper/essay, article, document, or book). Abstracts go beyond standard summaries (like on the back cover of a book) by revealing the scope of a paper and its topics, which are whittled-down to an approximately 200-word paragraph.

Abstracts allow readers who may be interested in a longer work to quickly decide <u>whether it is worth their time to read it</u> (something of use to all of us!). Also, many online databases use abstracts to index larger works. Therefore, abstracts should contain **keywords and phrases** that allow for **easy searching**

Abstract styles and requirements often vary for different fields. A *social science* or *scientific* abstract, for example, may contain its scope, purpose, results, and contents. An abstract of a *humanities work*, on the other hand, may provide the thesis, background, and conclusion of the larger work. It's important to note that an abstract is NOT a review, nor does it critique the main work. **Abstract requirements for specific disciplines may be found in APA, MLA and Chicago documentation stylebooks.**

How will I know if or when *I* need to write an abstract?

Easy – your instructor will inform you accordingly!

Aside from saving readers time, the two most important reasons for writing an abstract are **selection and indexing**.

When do <u>most</u> college students write abstracts?

- when writing an in-depth undergraduate research paper or advanced essay
- when completing an M.A. (graduate) thesis or a Ph.D. dissertation

Other reasons to write abstracts

- when submitting articles to print or online journals
- when applying for research grants
- when writing a book proposal

- when writing a proposal for a conference paper
- when writing a proposal for a book chapter

What should I include in the abstract?

Abstracts are generally written **AFTER** the main paper is completed, but **BEFORE** the work is submitted. Think of an abstract as a scholarly sample of the larger work, answering many of the same questions as the paper/report itself:

• What was done?
• Why was it done?
• How was it done?
• What was found?
• What is the significance of the findings?
• Who was involved?

Additionally, all abstracts include:

- A full citation of the source, preceding the abstract.
- The most important information first.
- The same type and style of language found in the original, including technical language.
- Key words and phrases that quickly identify the content and focus of the work.
- Clear, concise, and powerful language.

Abstracts may include:

- The thesis of the work, usually in the first sentence.
- Background information that places the work in the larger body of literature.
- The same chronological structure as the original work.

Types of abstracts

Among the variety of abstract types, the two most frequently used are ***descriptive*** and ***informative*** abstracts. They have different aims, components and styles. If you are unsure as which type of abstract is required for a class, just ask your instructor or read other abstracts in your field.

Descriptive abstracts

A descriptive abstract indicates the type of information found in the work. It makes no judgments about the work, nor does it provide results or conclusions of the research. It does incorporate key words found in the text and may include the purpose, methods, and

scope of the research. Essentially, the descriptive abstract describes the work being abstracted. Some people consider it an outline of the work, rather than a summary. Descriptive abstracts are usually 100 words or less.

Example of a Descriptive abstract (in research):

"It is an important and difficult job to write an eye catching abstract. A large percentage of the manuscripts that are submitted to academic journals are rejected because their abstracts are poorly written. This paper provides a new and step by step approach for writing a good structured abstract."

Informative abstracts

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 act as a replacement for the work itself. That is, the writer presents and explains all the main arguments, 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.

Example of an Informative abstract (on abstracts):

Abstracts present the essential elements of a longer work in a short and powerful statement. The purpose of an abstract is to provide prospective readers the opportunity to judge the relevance of the longer work to their projects. Abstracts also include the key terms found in the longer work and the purpose and methods of the research. Authors abstract various longer works, including book proposals, dissertations, and online journal articles. There are two main types of abstracts: descriptive and informative. A descriptive abstract briefly describes the longer work, while an informative abstract presents all the main arguments and important results. This handout provides examples of various types of abstracts and instructions on how to construct one.

And finally, when writing abstracts:

Do:	Don't:
• Communicate a crucial piece of information in every sentence. • Use the active voice as much as possible. • Revise the draft into smooth, stand-alone prose; the abstract itself should be a mini-essay. • Proofread, proofread, and proofread • Revise accordingly	• Include lengthy examples, tables, and supporting details. • Compact information into noun strings and nominalizations. • Include information that doesn't appear in your paper. • Refer extensively to other works. • Define terms.

Works Consulted:

- The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/abstracts/)

- University of Houston – Clear Lake Writing Center (https://www.uhcl.edu/writing-center/documents/tip-sheets/aritinganabstract.pdf)

- Research.com (https://research.com/research/how-to-write-a-research-paper-abstract)

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