

Writing Summaries of Your Research

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What are the reasons we write abstracts?

In your discipline, when do people write abstracts of their research?

What experiences do you have with summarizing your work?

At what stage of your research were you?

Articles

Calls for Papers for Conferences

Some Publication Submissions

Grant and Job Applications

What are abstracts meant to do?

Summarize your research ... and:

- Inform readers what is in your journal article and help them decide to read your work
- Make connections between your work and an overarching theme
 - For conferences
 - For essay collections

What Information Do Abstracts Include?

Varies a bit by discipline, but usually:

- Main objective or rationale of the project
 - Research question, gap in current scholarship, social concern
- Methods used
 - Description of process you used to conduct research, theoretical framework, methodological assumptions
- Results or product
 - Outcome of the research, preliminary results, even hypotheses
- Conclusions about the implications of the project
 - What does this contribute to the field? What makes it interesting, important, worth investigating further?

What Makes a Good Abstract?

Article Abstracts:

- Watch your word count! Journals will have their own guidelines, but generally aim for roughly 150-300 words.
- Be straightforward - write short, declarative sentences.
- Be concise! Don't use three words where one will do.
- Avoid overly long intro or conclusion, or focusing too much on background
- Focus on what you have done and will do. Don't include information that's not in the article.
- Avoid jargon. Your abstract will likely be read by a wider audience than your specialization.

What Makes a Good Abstract?

Conference Abstracts:

- Usually longer in length. A full page is generally a good length.
- Your goal and audience are a bit different:
 - Aimed at organizers; conference audience is secondary
 - Indicate your paper's interest to a general audience
 - Demonstrate relevance to conference or panel theme
- Use of the first person may be more acceptable

Style tip:

For both, check with your adviser or someone else in your field about the prevalence of active or passive voice

Evaluating Abstracts

Using a rubric:

A grading rubric can help you identify clear goals for your own writing--they're not just for grading!

Holistic method of evaluating a particular kind of writing, addressing content, style, and mechanics.

Department of Energy, Office of Science research abstract rubric:

http://education.lbl.gov/assets/docs/DOE_Abstractrubric.pdf

Beginning to Write Your Abstract

Questions to consider:

- Why did you do this study/project?
- What is the research question?
- What did you do, and how? How does the design of the study address the research question
- What did you find? How convincing are these results?
- What did you learn from your findings? What about the results was surprising?
- What aspects of the original question remain unanswered?

If your project is related to a new method or technology, you might consider:

- What are the advantages of the method or device?
- How well does it work?