

## ABSTRACTS

Many professionals rely on a particular type of summary called an abstract. Abstracts are often used to identify the introductory commentary, materials and methods of study, instruments or scientific tools used in an experiment/study, any results or findings (including any relevant data/facts), any conclusions/recommendations/solutions, and any other material deemed significant by the author or primary investigator (usually a scientist or research who is in-charge of the research or the publication of the research). You can find abstracts in many different disciplines from music to particle physics to medicine to psychology.

Abstracts tend to be used to take the place of full text articles/books in order to “speed up” or shorten the time that it takes to find research related to a particular topic. In other words, instead of reading 300 pages, you can receive the gist (or important points) in 300 words.

Basically, there are three types of abstracts:

1. A descriptive (or indicative) abstract resembles a table of contents, except that it is situated in paragraph form. As the abstract presents each section or chapter, the author includes some important details about it.
2. An informative abstract presents a greatly compressed (concise) form of the article or book. This form may include the most important facts, figures, data, or other information presented in the paper. Unlike a mystery novel, it does not hold back any information.
3. An evaluative abstract provides a brief summary while including the writer’s personal assessment of the original document.

Some notes about abstracts

+Abstracts are typically formatted as one single-spaced block-style paragraph (or block), and abstracts are written in the past tense

+Ideally, you should include the most important information from the text, which helps the reader to understand the full/longer text without having to actually read it.

+Unlike a novel, may mention the ending of a story or the results of an experiment. In other words, abstracts do not keep the reader in suspense; you can “give away” the ending.

+The tone of an abstract should be un-biased, formal, and informative. Only report the facts. Also, the abstract should be clear, coherent, and concise (with a particular emphasis on brevity).

+Convey the message of the longer text clearly and in “fewer” words.

## HOW TO COMPOSE AN ABSTRACT

1. Read the full text or longer version of the text.
2. Re-read the text and take notes. Make sure to keep in mind any methods, materials, results, and any significant components of the author's introduction or discussion. Note any facts, statistics, findings, etc.
3. Take your notes, and place the information in appropriate order (e.g. chronologically, event by event, presenting the problem then the solution, discussing cause then effect, discussing effect then cause, etc).
4. Make sure to create transitions between ideas. Consider using conjuncts (e.g., first, second, third, etc. – if needed).
5. Rephrase (or carefully write) the material in a “reader-friendly” way.
6. Edit, edit, and edit again!

### Abstracts tend to contain these characteristics:

- +Abstracts try not to repeat details
- +Abstracts usually provide the bibliographic citation from the original source (usually above your abstract).
- +Abstracts keep in the third-person point of view.
- +Abstracts try not to be biased (do not inform the reader of your like/dislike for the material/text).
- +Abstracts convey only facts
- +Abstracts do not contain speculation, commentary, or give opinions.
- + The name of the type of Abstract printed and bolded above (**Abstract** for conventional abstracts and **Executive Summary** for executive summaries).
- +Abstracts are typically about 150-250 words or less (unless otherwise specified by your instructor, the assignment, or a call-for-papers/proposals sheet).
- +Should be a self-contained text and should contain no figure or table references.
- +The language should be familiar to the reader/audience.
- +All abbreviations and complicated (or new) terms should be defined.

## HUMOR

About being concise...

Author and scientist, Robert Day, presents a good analogy for writing abstracts in his book, How to Write & Publish a Scientific Paper:

The story goes like this: One night a symphony orchestra was scheduled to play Beethoven's famous "Ninth Symphony." Before the performance, the string bass players happened to be chatting among themselves, and one of the bass players reminded the others that there is a long "rest" for the bass players towards the conclusion of the Beethoven's Ninth. One bassist said, "Tonight, instead of sitting on the stage looking dumb all the time, why don't we sneak off the stage, go out the back door, go to the bar across the street, and belt down a few?" They all agreed. That night, when "rest" time came, they indeed snuck off the stage, went to the bar, and knock back about four strong tequilas each. One bass player said, "Well, it's about time we headed back for the finale." Where upon another bassist said, "Not to worry." After we decided to do this, I went up to the conductor's stand and, at the place in the conductor's score where our rest ends, I tied a bunch of strings around his score. It will take him a few minutes to untie those knots. "Let's have another!" And, they did.

If I were writing the abstract for this short story, then I would have to write: "It's the last of the Ninth, the score it tied, and the basses are loaded."

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

Many business professionals use a particular type of abstract called an executive abstract to understand longer project proposals and progress reports. You have heard the old maxim "time is money." Well, in reality, it is. People in business need the facts without the "fluff." So, they rely on executive summaries to provide this information quickly and easily.