



The Writing Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO

DENVER | ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

Writing an Abstract

An abstract is a short summary (100-500 words) preceding an academic article or review that allows readers to survey the contents of a paper quickly and decide if they want to spend time reading further or in-depth. Often the abstract is the only portion of a document many readers ever see, so it's important that it's accurate and clear. Abstracts may include keywords that enable people interested in the topic to find it in databases.

Typical Structure

1. **Justification** (Introduction, Literature review)
2. **Research Process** (Theoretical framework, Methods)
3. **Findings** (Results)
4. **Implications** (Discussion, Conclusion)

Remember that an abstract is a summary, so it's normal for it to have similar (and sometimes some of the same) content as your paper. It's a condensed version of the document contents.

Questions to Answer

1. Justification

- What gap in the literature existed that motivated the research question?
- What problem(s) does the research seek to solve?
- What question(s) does the research seek to answer?
- What place does this question/topic hold within the field/area of study?

2. Research Process

- How was research conducted? What methods were used?
- What types of analysis?
- What theories in the field informed this methodology?

3. Findings

1. What are the most significant results of the research?
2. How do the results compare to similar research?
3. Were there any significant limitations?

4. Implications

- What conclusions can be made about the findings?
- How does this research impact the literature of the field?

Effective Abstracts are...

- **Accurate**—An abstract reflects the purpose and content of its paper
 - Do not include any information in your abstract that is not in your paper
 - Compare your abstract with the sections of your paper to make sure it covers the same points
- **Nonevaluative**— Avoid making editorial comments on the merit of the research or writing; limit your abstract to the contents of your paper
- **Readable**—Use direct and concrete language when writing your abstract
 - See the Writing Center's Concision handout
- **Concise**—The goal is a short summary!
 - Include the four or five most important elements of your paper
 - Describe them in as few words as possible

Writing Tips

- Double-check the allowed word count for your assignment or submission
- Include specific search terms and keywords that researchers might use to find your work
- Use the same level of language formality found in the corresponding article/body of research
- Follow the same organizational structure of the document

Example Abstract

(1) This program was designed to address the prevalent issues of teen parenthood and poverty by introducing and reinforcing the importance of obtaining a post-secondary education to teen mothers in their junior or senior year of high school. (2) The program ran for eight weeks during the summer of 2003. Participants met once a week to participate in group building activities, get insights to what it will take to finish school, and receive information on services that are available to help them along the way. The young women also had the opportunity to tour the UW campus. (3) The participating high schools saw an increase of college enrollment for teen mothers. (4) The results indicate that programs like this can make a significant and measurable difference for teen mothers.