



The Writing Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO

DENVER | ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

Writing an Abstract

In its most basic form, an abstract is a condensed version of an academic article or body of research—a short, formal summary averaging between 100-500 words. It provides a justification for the study, an overview of the research process, the core results/findings, and a preview of the discussion/conclusion. Abstracts are typically written either to precede research articles or as part of conference proposals. They are significant because they act as brief guides for other researchers and because they may be the only portion of an essay, article, or proposal that some readers ever see.

Most abstracts cover the following topics:

- Motivation/Problem
- Methodology/Research Process/Theoretical Framework
- Results/Findings
- Conclusions/Implications/Discussion

1. Motivation/Problem

An abstract should briefly discuss the motivation for completing the research, including the necessity for the research or any gaps the study fills. After presenting such an argument, the writer should explain the problem or issue that the article addresses.

Questions to Consider:

1. What occurrence, instance, or gap in the research existed that motivated the research questions?
2. What problem(s) does the corresponding research seek to solve?
3. What question(s) does it answer?
4. What place does it hold within the field/area of study?

2. Methodology/Research Process

This portion of the abstract should carefully lay out the most relevant aspects of the study's methodology/research process, including literature reviewed (if applicable), population, participants, materials, types of analysis/measurement and controls (if applicable).

Questions to Consider:

1. How was research conducted? What methods were used?
2. What types of analysis?
3. How many/what type of texts were reviewed?

3. Results/Findings

Next, the writer should reveal the most significant result(s) of the research. Additionally, the writer may want to discuss whether or not the research supports, refutes or emulates previous research within the field.

Questions to Consider:

1. What was discovered through the research?
2. Was previous research supported, emulated, or refuted?
3. Was any aspect of the result(s) especially significant?

4. Conclusion/Implications/Discussion

Finally, the abstract must indicate the importance and implications of the research findings, indicating how the research fits into the current conversation of the appropriate discipline.

Questions to Consider:

1. What does the research reveal?
2. How does this change the way the field/topic/issue has been perceived?
3. How does this research change the previous state of research?
4. What is the overall significance?

4. Other Considerations:

- Meet the word count limitation, if there is one.
- State any major restrictions or limitations on the results.
- Include specific search terms and keywords that researchers might use in searching for the article.
- Use the same level of language—lexicon and formality—found in the corresponding article/body of research.
- Follow the same organizational structure of the original work.