



# How to Write an Abstract

An abstract is a brief summary of a longer research paper, report, article or grant proposal. It tells readers the gist of the research: problem, methods, results, conclusion. A clear and concise abstract is an invitation to read more!

## REFLECT ON YOUR WORK

Reflect on the purpose, methodology, results and conclusions or outcome to identify what needs to be highlighted in your abstract. It is good practice to write and revise your abstract as the project progresses, because it often changes as the research goes forward. Some researchers develop abstracts of several lengths: 100 words, 200 words and 300 words. Challenge yourself to simplify your research in a way that can be understood quickly. Ask your friends and colleagues to read it – a clear, simple abstract can be understood by anyone, even those outside your discipline. Finally: who might find your work useful? Think about potential audience.

## CLARIFY THE PROJECT

Separate the “why” from the “what”: it can be difficult to distinguish between the purpose of the study and what process, methods and tools were used to conduct the investigation. The goal is to clearly present the original question or problem that prompted the research and then describe the process for finding out more or resolving the question. Include the methods or methodology and explain any analysis or tools. Finally, mention the main findings, that is, what information or knowledge was discovered or what might be revealed through more research.

## THINK OF KEY WORDS

Key words will help you hone the abstract focus and eliminate unnecessary detail. An abstract gives just enough detail to outline the essence and outcome of your work – it entices readers to dive into the larger report or article for more details. In some disciplines, the abstract concludes with a list of key words to help with literature searches and skimming. Selecting key words which are useful in searches and can be cross-referenced to similar or comparable research in the same field is important. Relate your work to what is already out there.

## WHO USES YOUR ABSTRACT?

A well-written abstract can focus attention on the research, share the study with a larger audience, increase awareness of the research, profile the researcher/author, or secure financial support. Abstracts can be written in advance of, or during research, to present the project to funding agencies or to a professor for review and feedback. Abstracts are used to apply to present at symposiums and conferences. Other abstracts are written after the research is complete, and the paper or article has been written, as a short summary of the work. They may be submitted to publishers or for prizes and awards including funding applications and scholarships. As well, they are used to describe the research for online and/or library searches when a paper is published.

