

What makes a good abstract?

A good abstract:

- uses one well-developed paragraph that is coherent and concise, and is able to stand alone as a unit of information
- covers all the essential academic elements of the full-length paper, namely the background, purpose, focus, methods, results and conclusions
- contains no information not included in the paper
- is written in plain English and is understandable to a wider audience, as well as to your discipline-specific audience
- often uses passive structures in order to report on findings, focusing on the issues rather than people
- uses the language of the original paper, often in a more simplified form for the more general reader
- usually does not include any referencing
- in publications such as journals, it is found at the beginning of the text, while in academic assignments, it is placed on a separate preliminary page.

Common mistakes:

Turner (Turner A. English Solutions for Engineering Research Writing. 2006.) lists a few common errors in preparing abstracts for publication or conference proposals.

- Holding back significant points or information to try to get the reader to read the article. *An abstract is not a mystery story but should contain all the significant points of the article.*
- Including references such as (Kim et al., 2000) or [1] or 1 in the abstract. *Only a very few conference abstracts ask for references.*
- Including paragraphs. *Since abstracts are put in databases they don't usually have paragraphs. Even most 350 word Dissertation or Thesis abstracts don't have paragraphs. Individual university departments may be flexible, however.*
- Wasting introduction sentences. *The lead sentence of an abstract should not be too general; it should include the topic of your paper. Here is an example of a wasted first sentence of an abstract. There is not enough information to give the reader a clear idea of what the paper is about. "The Internet is very important these days."*
- Using the same sentence for the first line of the abstract and the first line of the introduction. *It is considered poor writing style.*

How do I write a good abstract?

- First re-read your paper/report for an overview. Then read each section and condense the information in each down to 1-2 sentences.
- Next read these sentences again to ensure that they cover the major points in your paper.
- Ensure you have written something for each of the key points outlined above for either the descriptive or informative abstract.
- Check the word length and further reduce your words if necessary by cutting out unnecessary words or rewriting some of the sentences into a single, more succinct sentence.
- Edit for flow and expression.

Source: adelaide.edu.au