

06-06991 - Research Skills

## Writing abstracts

There are three types of abstract: descriptive, informative and critical. The qualities of a good abstract are reviewed and some of the common errors are given. Practical experience is based around some examples of abstracts which are reviewed to see if they follow the guidelines and avoid the common errors.



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# Three types of abstract descriptive abstracts

- Short usually less than 100 words.
- Includes:
- purpose of the work (objectives)
- · method used
- · scope of the work
- Doesn't include:
  - results, conclusions and recommendations

Reader will probably have to read the document to see if it is relevant.

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# Three types of abstract informative abstracts

Fairly short - from 200 words to a page or more.

- Includes:
- purpose of the work (objectives)
  - · method used
  - scope of the work
  - results
  - · conclusions and recommendations

Communicates the content of the document, so the reader mayn't need to read the document.

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## Three types of abstract critical abstracts

Similar to a review - but shorter.

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## Qualities of a good informative abstract

#### Concise

- Usually less than 250 words

#### Structured

- The abstract has an introduction-body-conclusion structure.
- In engineering, this is sometimes seen as a situation-problem-solution-evaluation paradigm.

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## Qualities of a good informative abstract

Reports the paper's structure

 Reports the purpose/objectives, method, findings, conclusions of the paper.

#### Connected

 Provides logical connections between the parts of the abstract.

### Adds nothing new

 Summarizes the paper - doesn't add any new material or analysis.

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#### Don't's

There are a number of very common errors made in writing descriptive and informative abstracts:

#### Repeat the title

Don't repeat the title of the paper as it is already in the title (and the more you repeat the title, the more boring it gets and the more space it wastes).

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## *Don't* ...

## refer to things outside the abstract

The title and abstract should function as a self-contained unit - eg they might be used in an indexing and abstracting service like *Compendex* or *Science Citation Index*.

Don't include references to literature (eg Bloggs, 1999), figures and tables in the paper.

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### *Don't* ...

## Use obscure abbreviations and acronyms

You may define abbreviations and acronyms in your text - but the reader will have to read your paper to find out what your abstract is about.

Some abbreviations are OK - eg "A.D." and "B.C.E." and acronyms like "Nato" - but these are little used in computing.

Do you know what "LFG" and "WAM" mean?

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