



How to Write an Abstract

An abstract is a concise summary of an academic paper or presentation. The purpose of an abstract is to briefly inform the reader of a paper's contents so that they can determine whether it is worth reading or, in some instances, even publishing.

An Abstract Should...

- Contain all the major aspects of your paper.
 - Main arguments, the overall importance of research, ultimate findings, general methodology (for many science papers), and so forth are all integral to a well-written abstract; if the reader wants to know the raw data and nuanced specifics of your arguments, they can read your paper.
- Be concise.
 - An abstract should be no more than 300 words; preferably between 100-250 words.
 - Background information important to a greater understanding of a paper should not be included in an abstract; that information belongs in the introduction section of a paper or presentation. Insubstantial phrases like "the study of diplomatic relations is important to society..." or "[well-known scientist] is best known for..." are unnecessary and offer the reader nothing. These phrases would make an abstract, which is meant to be concise, too long and bulky.

Speaking and Writing Center [1]: This phrasing is unnecessary because your point in the abstract is not to argue whether something is important or not, but to summarize the paper. It also is unnecessarily wordy, as even if you were to need this sentence, adding the "to society" is not needed to describe what the study is important to.

Parts of an Abstract

- Objective
 - Note what the objective was driving you to conduct your research and why the research itself is relevant to its field
 - May include some background if the subject is particularly obscure/niche; a single sentence of summarized background information is all you should include in an abstract if necessary, as the majority of this information will be in your introduction/background section of the paper

Speaking and Writing Center [2]: This phrasing may be relevant in the introduction of your paper, where you want to acquaint the reader with the credentials of the researchers who may have done work before you, but it is not necessary to the abstract.



- While it is not always necessary to have references in your abstract, it can cite important work that your research builds upon. If you do need to cite sources, you could:
 - Reference a source as a narrative introduction: “This research builds on the work of [x]”
 - Reference work you are recognizing as influential in a parenthetical citation in the same style as the one used in your paper.
- Methods
 - For scientific abstracts, this section includes the experiment’s general procedure
 - Do not include a step-by-step summary
 - Often one sentence of the abstract that gives a very basic overview of the procedure, including any well-known tests or methods
 - Ex: Filtration and recrystallization were utilized to isolate the compound and a sample was analyzed through NMR spectroscopy for identification.
 - Results
 - The main portion of the abstract
 - For scientific abstracts, includes numerical results and final results (though NO raw data)
 - Also note the confidence in results, such as error percentages
 - This section may address the overall discoveries of your research and/or the main argument you wish to convey in your paper
 - Minor details of your argument should not be discussed in the abstract
 - Conclusion
 - Describe the overall importance and implications of your research/argument and what further research/development may be needed
 - Note any flaws or limitations to the research/argument
 - Note how this research/argument compares to the existing body of literature, such as addressing gaps in prior knowledge for future investigation of connected concepts. However, it does not restate prior information discussed in the objective section.



Examples of Abstracts

Scientific Abstract Example

The Speaking and Writing Center (SWC) helps students improve on written work and presentations for their classes. Many students say that they perform better on assignments when they visit the SWC first; this study aimed to quantify the difference in grades that students receive with scheduling versus without scheduling an SWC appointment for the assignment. Out of a class of 50 students, 25 were asked to go to the SWC, while 25 were instructed to complete all assignments without help. The students who scheduled and attended SWC appointments received an average of 14.48% higher on assignments than those who did not make and attend appointments. This data aligns with both the student accounts and the experimental hypothesis, suggesting that SWC appointments do have an impact on student grades ($p=0.02$). However, in future replications of the study, the researchers would have students complete a pre-test to gauge individual performance to pair match for even distribution of base skill level so as not to skew results.

Speaking and Writing Center [3]: Background

Speaking and Writing Center [4]: Objective

Speaking and Writing Center [5]: Methods

Speaking and Writing Center [6]: Results

Speaking and Writing Center [7]: Conclusion

Humanity Abstract Example

To understand how tutoring higher education students in speaking and writing skills can ultimately better their academic performances, this project focuses on how the Speaking and Writing Center fosters comprehension and coherency skills in students. The data for this project was collected through observations in the Speaking and Writing Center. Consultants and students were also interviewed. Reasons for going to the Speaking and Writing Center discussed in this project include expanding one's skill set, learning how to use citation styles, and receiving guidance for improving clarity. This project discovered how services like the Speaking and Writing Center give students opportunities and resources to improve their written and verbal skills.

Speaking and Writing Center [8]: Objective

Speaking and Writing Center [9]: Methods

Speaking and Writing Center [10]: Results