

An abstract is a condensed version of a longer piece of writing. Typically, it is under 200 words and is comprehensive yet concise. By summarizing and highlighting major points, it allows readers to quickly assess whether the full document will be worthwhile to read. According to the APA (2010), a well-written abstract is “dense with information,” accurate, nonevaluative, coherent, and concise (p. 25).

Generally, abstracts can be divided into two categories:

- **Descriptive:** describes the main features of the document in just a few sentences, but still includes information about the purpose, scope, and/or methodology of a report.
- **Informative:** unlike the descriptive abstract, contains some information from the report. It provides a concise summary of the article, including a statement on the importance of the article, the main argument or problem the article attempts to solve, the methods used, the results the writer reports, and why those results matter.

Occasions when you may be asked to write an abstract:

- Prior to a final submission of a lengthy research paper to a professor
- As a component of a thesis or dissertation
- When your paper is selected for publication in a journal
- When submitting a long report to a supervisor
- Abstract of someone else’s document as a school assignment or collaborative research project

Before you write:

- What is the main point of the paper?
- Is there a question the writer is answering, a problem s/he is solving, or a piece of research s/he is confirming or countering?
- If this is a social/physical science document, what research methods were used?
- If this is a humanities document, what is the interpretive method used (e.g. feminist, historical)?
- What answer, solution, or counter proposal does the writer offer?
- What are the implications of the research and why do they matter?

When you write:

- Arrange your answers in the order above, beginning with a topic sentence
- Condense the information, but do not delete articles (*a, an, the*) or needed transitional words (*however, therefore*)
- Use objective voice (“*This study examines...*” **not** “*I examined...*”)
- Use passive voice when you discuss the research method, to keep the focus on the method (“*Findings are based on observations made during 10 two-hour sessions...*” **not** “*I’m basing my findings on the observations I made*”)
- Avoid overloading your abstract with technical terms or unnecessary jargon
- Do not include illustrations, tables, or bibliographic references.

