Description

What is an Abstract in a Research Paper?

An abstract is a self-contained, short, and powerful statement that covers the main points of a piece of writing. Unlike executive summaries written for non-specialist audiences, abstracts use the same level of technical language and expertise found in the article itself. And unlike general summaries, which can be adapted in many ways to meet various readers' and writers' needs, abstracts are typically 150–250 words and have a fairly standard format.

Myth!

An abstract is not a review, nor does it evaluate the work being abstracted. That is, the abstract is an original document rather than an excerpted passage.

Why is an Abstract Required?

You may be writing an abstract for various reasons. The two most important are

1. *Selection* – to help readers decide if they want to read your article
2. *Indexing* – for quick recovery and cross-referencing.

Many abstracts are published in abstract journals or in online databases without the complete paper itself. Thus, an abstract might serve as the only means by which a researcher determines what information a paper contains.

Therefore, although limited in word count, an abstract must do almost as much work as the multi-page paper that follows it. This means that it should, in most cases, include the following components: motivation, problem statement, approach, results, and conclusions. Each component is typically a single sentence or sometimes spreads across two sentences. Abstracts must also contain keywords and phrases that allow for easy searching.

Tip 1!

Think of a half-dozen search phrases and keywords that people working in your field might use. Be sure that those exact phrases appear in your abstract, so that they will appear at the top of a

search result listing.

How to Meet the Word Limit?

One of the most critical points to consider while writing an abstract is observing the word limit. Ignoring the limit often leads to the abstract being returned with a request to make it shorter. Reviewers say so easily, however, when abstracting your own work, it may be difficult to condense a piece of writing that you agonized over for weeks (or months or even years) into a 150- to 250-word statement. Described in this article are three simple steps to writing an abstract within a word limit.

Tip 2!

The Word Count feature of MS Word can help you track the length of your abstract. Click on the status bar in the bottom left hand corner of the Word window. It will tell you the character count, word count, and number of lines and paragraphs.

Step 1: Write the "Best" First Draft

One way of writing an effective abstract is to start with a draft of the complete paper and apply the following treatment. At this stage, don't be overly concerned about the length. Understanding what to write in the abstract of a research paper is crucial. Just make sure you include all the key information listed below:

1. Highlight the objective and conclusion that are in the paper's Introduction and Discussion.
2. Bracket information in the Methods section of the paper that contains relevant keyword information.
3. Highlight the results from the Discussion or Results section of the paper.
4. Combine the above highlighted and bracketed information into a single paragraph. One way of doing this is to begin the first sentence with the general topic.
5. Condense the bracketed information into key words and phrases that identify but do not explain the methods used.
6. Delete extra words and phrases.
7. Delete any irrelevant background information.
8. Rephrase the first sentence so that it starts off with the new information contained in the paper, rather than with the phrase "this paper" or "this study."
9. Revise the paragraph so that the abstract conveys only essential information.

Step 2: Apply the "Avoid" Checklist

After completing the first draft, we need to ensure that no unnecessary content has been included in the abstract:

1. Do not add information not contained in the original work.
2. Avoid abbreviations or acronyms. Only define an abbreviation if the term appears multiple times in the abstract.
3. Omit background information, literature review, and detailed description of methods.

4. Avoid reference to other works.
5. Omit bibliography or citations.
6. Omit references, tables, and graphs.

In our next article, let's look at the other ways you can further reduce the word count of your Abstract.

Category

1. Manuscripts & Grants
2. Reporting Research

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