

Writing Abstracts: The Difficulty of Being Human and Scientific

What is the purpose of the abstract?

Imagine that you are going on a date. You are dying to make the best first impression you can. By presenting your abstract, you are “dating” your jury. You cannot be very extravagant, neither you can be conservative. You are simply presenting your individual, well-measured freshness. Your abstract format is your appearance, your abstract’s style is your “mint fresh breath,” your abstract’s content is your mind and your abstract’s conclusion is your soul.

Points to remember:

- ❖ *Write your name, department and the college or university you attend on the abstract*
- ❖ *Provide the title of the paper for which you have written the abstract*
- ❖ *Identify the areas that will be covered in your paper. Note, your scientific “freshness” must become visible here.*

Why can writing an abstract be difficult?

Sometimes writing a good abstract is more complicated than writing a research paper. In a way, the abstract is the opposite of the research paper. In the abstract, you are trying to condense the content of your thoughts. In the paper, you “stretch” them. The abstract is normally written after the paper is completed, whereas it is reviewed prior to the paper. Writing both well is a mental challenge. A good abstract is like a good commercial. You use colors, music, text (and subtext) to make a good commercial. You use your expertise, ideas, and precise language to make a good abstract. By submitting your abstract, you are trying to persuade your readers in 3 to 5 minutes that you are going to present something unique and valuable.

Points to remember:

- ❖ *Follow strictly the format requirements (250-300 words, double-spaced, 12pt. font).*
- ❖ *Find simple ways to explain complicated ideas. Avoid wordiness and emphasize your key concepts.*
- ❖ *Your abstract must be logically structured and provide an accurate picture of your paper.*

How should you think of the reader?

Just in case, think of your readers as very old nerds who are running out of time. Your abstract must “shake them up,” have them rub their eyes and read the abstract until the end. Your virtual readers might be very skeptical and conservative and you have to convince them. On the other hand, they can be very young and innovative and you have to convince them.

The abstract serves a broader audience than the research paper. It must be comprehensible to specialists and non-specialists of your area.

Points to remember:

- ❖ *Your thesis must balance between your scientific knowledge (for professionals) and common sense (for non-professionals).*
- ❖ *Limit the scientific terminology to the point at which it is accepted by the specialists and ignored by the non-specialists. An exception to this rule would be clearly technical abstracts*
- ❖ *To make your abstract lucid, test yourself: “Will the readers who have not been acquainted with my research area and/or point of view understand the abstract?” Make sure it seems logical even to the most unengaged readers.*

How much time do you need to write a good abstract?

Writing abstracts is a more time-consuming and complicated activity than it looks. There is an old joke about the person who wrote to his friend, "I have no time to write you a short letter. That's why I will write you a long one." If you risk writing your "short letter" in a short time, you can be easily disqualified.

Points to remember:

- ❖ *If your paper is already written, you might read it again before writing the abstract to ensure that you will include all substantial points in the abstract.*
- ❖ *It is normal that writing and shaping your abstract takes hours.*
- ❖ *Make sure you have read and proofread the abstract several times.*
- ❖ *Give it to read to a colleague or friend. Usually they find something you have omitted or overlooked.*

What should your abstract contain?

If you assume that it is an introduction to your paper, you are wrong.

If you assume that it is a description of your paper, you are wrong.

If you assume that it is your contribution to everything written and discovered in the field before, you are wrong.

If you assume that it is the conclusion of what you have done, you are wrong.

The abstract's content is the balance and incorporation of all of the above.

Points to remember:

- ❖ *The title must contain immediate information on your scientific area so your judges know that your domain fits the symposium's parameters.*
- ❖ *The content consists of statements of objectives, methods, results, and conclusions. You have between 250 and 300 words to express yourself, so this allows you to use only a few sentences in each statement.*
- ❖ *Search for key words that will imprint onto the memory of the readers.*
- ❖ *Envisioned as a "mini essay," the abstract must include paragraphs that are "cohesive in miniature." The transition between them has to be distinct and smooth.*
- ❖ *The ratio between the statements can be slightly adapted in favor of your main point. If your uniqueness is in the methods, you might add an extra sentence there after you have cut it from another sphere, which you have rejected as the strongest one*

What to avoid in an abstract?

In your abstract, you have to remove the "flesh" and the "blood" from the paper and provide only the "skeleton" of it. Do not hesitate to get rid of words that are not conducive to the sense and the elegance of your phrases.

Points to remember:

- ❖ *Avoid categorical and eccentric statements.*
- ❖ *Avoid frequent usage of acronyms and abbreviations. If it is necessary, always provide the full name before resorting to them.*
- ❖ *Do not include general introductory matters and historical background.*
- ❖ *Do not insert tables and charts, unless this is a crucial part of your thesis.*
- ❖ *Do not include citations, unless you have to refer to a source on which your thesis is built.*