

How to Write a WINNING ABSTRACT

Abstracts are the front door to your paper or presentation.

Your abstract should be a stand-alone document that summarizes your research or your ideas and encourages readers to learn more about your work. Use these tips to create abstracts for a variety of types of papers and presentations, ranging from rigorous research and evaluation studies to presentations describing the innovative features of your program.

"Abstract quality is a major determinant in the life and legacy of a paper."

— Alspach (2017)

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ABSTRACT TITLE



How can you grab the reader's attention?

The abstract title is the first thing that someone will read. It should be engaging, succinct, and clear. The title should include keywords from the research that can be used in searches/indexes. An abstract title should be no more than ten to twelve words and should use active words.

KEYWORDS



What keywords will help people find your paper or presentation if they are searching for information about the topics your research covers?

Provide keywords based on the conference or journal guidelines. Select up to six keywords commonly associated with your field of study or practice. Choosing the right keywords will help your abstract get noticed by people searching for information about your topics. If helpful, review keywords used by similar works cited.

INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE



Why did you do this work?

Summarize the background in two to three sentences. Highlight what is known about your topic and the gap your research or program is addressing, then clearly summarize your research questions or project aims. Keep the summary at a high level.

RESULTS



What did you find or what did you learn?

For a research study, summarize the most important findings and state whether the findings were statistically significant and focus on results that answer your research questions. For other types of papers or presentations, describe lessons learned.

METHODS



What did you do and how?

If applicable, summarize your study sample, intervention approach, data collection, and data analysis methods. If your paper or presentation is not a research study, describe your approach to gathering the information.

DISCUSSION

Q What do your results mean? How do your findings add to what was known about a topic and how can they be used to improve practice, solve a problem, or fill a gap?

Discuss any new or innovative findings and information about how your findings address the gap or question identified in your introduction. Discuss your research in the context of what is already known and propose next steps for further inquiry, if applicable.

CONCLUSION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Q Why are your findings important?

Express key takeaway messages and implications of your findings. Keep in mind many readers skip to the conclusion before reading the abstract.

DOS and DON'TS

- Make sure the language is clear and concise. Abstracts tend to have a word limit (usually fewer than 250 words) so make sure you carefully select words.
- Connect the dots. Be sure that all the main points are included and that you show how the parts are connected to each other.
- Use the same structure and order as your main paper or presentation. Use [reverse outlining](#) to identify the main points of your paper.
- Follow the requirements of the journal or conference to which you plan to submit your abstract. Read abstracts published in the same journal before writing yours.
- Write the abstract last after you have written your main paper or presentation.
- Don't include acronyms, uncommon abbreviations, or citations in your abstract; reserve these for the paper or presentation.
- Don't include new material that is not in your main paper or presentation.
- Don't focus on other people's work, although you should provide enough background to show how your research relates to what is known about the topic.

Additional Resources for Writing a Winning Abstract

Andrade, C. (2011). [How to write a good abstract for a scientific paper or conference presentation](#). *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 53(2), 172-175. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.82558>.

Boullata, J. I., & Mancuso, CE. (2007). [A "how-to" guide in preparing abstracts and poster presentations](#). *Nutrition Clinical Practice*, 22(6), 641-646. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0115426507022006641>.

Happell, B. (2007). [Hitting the target! A no tears approach to writing an abstract for a conference presentation](#). *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 16(6), 447-452. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1447-0349.2007.00501.x>.

Pierson, D. J. (2004). [How to write an abstract that will be accepted for presentation at a national meeting](#). *Respiratory Care*, 49(10), 1206-1212.

The Writing Center. (2021). [Writing an Abstract for Your Research Paper](#). University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Writing Techniques

Reverse outlining: [Reverse Outline – The Writing Center • University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill \(unc.edu\)](#)

Webbing: [Webbing – The Writing Center • University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill \(unc.edu\)](#)

Color coding: [Color Coding – The Writing Center • University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill \(unc.edu\)](#)

Abstract Example

Burrus, B. B., Krieger, K., Rutledge, R., Rabre, A., Axelson, S., Miller, A., White, L., & Jackson C. (2018). [Building bridges to a brighter tomorrow: A systematic evidence review of interventions that prepare adolescents for adulthood](#). *American Journal of Public Health* 108, S25-S31, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304175>.

References

Alspach, J. G. (2017). [Writing for Publication 101: Why the Abstract Is So Important](#). *Critical Care Nurse*, 37(4), 12-15. <https://doi.org/10.4037/ccn2017466>.