



Creating an Abstract

What is an abstract?

A brief, comprehensive summary of the contents of an article.

How long should an abstract be?

No longer than 120 words.

Why do I need an abstract?

Abstracts allow readers to survey the contents of an article quickly, and enable abstracting and information services to index and retrieve articles. When people are researching on an online database of journals for literature they can use in their research, they may thumb through the abstracts. They may then decide on the basis of the abstract whether to read the entire article.

What makes a good abstract?

Accuracy:

- The abstract should reflect the contents of the manuscript.

Self-contained style:

- Define abbreviations (except units of measurement) and acronyms
- Spell out names of tests and drugs (use generic names for drugs)
- Define unique terms
- Paraphrase rather than quote
- Include names of authors (initials and surnames) and dates of publication in citations of other publications

Concision and specificity:

- Make each sentence “maximally informative” (especially the lead sentence)
- Be brief
- Begin the abstract with the most important information
- Include the 4 or 5 most important concepts, findings, or implications

Non-evaluative language:

- Do not add or comment on what is in the body of the manuscript.
- Report, do not evaluate

Coherence and readability:

- Use 3rd person rather than 1st
- Avoid sentences with no information (“It is concluded that” or “___ is discussed”)

American Psychological Association. (2007). Content and organization of a manuscript. In *Publication Manual* (5th ed.). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Ask yourself these questions when writing the abstract:

- Why would another researcher be interested in this research?
- What are the most important aspects of the research? What should a reader be sure to know about the research?
- What information will the reader have to have in order to understand the most important aspects?

Example of a good abstract:

Construction sites are major contributors to nonpoint source (NPS) pollution. However, a lack of personnel to enforce erosion control regulations means that few developers apply effective erosion control. New approaches are needed to increase erosion control on construction sites if this source of NPS pollution is to be significantly reduced. This study tests whether an economic advantage exists for developers who use vegetative cover for erosion control, independent of advantages gained in addressing environmental or regulatory concerns. A market survey shows that homebuyers and realtors perceive vegetated lots to be worth more than unvegetated lots, and this increased value exceeds the cost of seeding. Thus, developers can now be encouraged to invest in vegetative cover because of the potentially high return on the investment.

Above abstract broken down into sections:

(NOTE: DO NOT separate the abstract in your paper. It is merely to demonstrate how an abstract should be structured.)

Introduction: Construction sites are major contributors to nonpoint source (NPS) pollution. However, a lack of personnel to enforce erosion control regulations means that few developers apply effective erosion control.

Research: Problem New approaches are needed to increase erosion control on construction sites if this source of NPS pollution is to be significantly reduced.

Body: This study tests whether an economic advantage exists for developers who use vegetative cover for erosion control, independent of advantages gained in addressing environmental or regulatory concerns.

Results: A market survey shows that homebuyers and realtors perceive vegetated lots to be worth more than unvegetated lots, and this increased value exceeds the cost of seeding.

Conclusion: Thus, developers can now be encouraged to invest in vegetative cover because of the potentially high return on the investment.

Laflen, A. (2004). Abstract [Computer manual]. Retrieved December 10, 2008, from <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/reportW/abstract.html>