

How to Write an Abstract

Writing an abstract for an academic presentation or publication can seem overwhelming, and the word limit typically associated with an abstract submission can add even more pressure to the writing process. What information needs to be included? What information is extraneous? What level of detail is sufficient? How do you make a convincing argument in a concise manner? How do you write an interesting summary of your work?

Here are a few things to think about as you initiate, write, and finalize your abstract.

- 1. Who is your audience?** Know your audience and then adopt the appropriate tone, language, and technicality to the reader. For instance, some technical jargon may be appropriate when submitting an abstract to a field specific or specialty journal. In contrast, when submitting to a cross-discipline journal or large interdisciplinary conference, a diverse array of readers should be able to understand the content of the abstract. Refer to the following questions for guidance.
 - a. Where will you be presenting your work?
 - b. Is your audience a broad academic community? An international or national conference?
 - c. Is this a submission to a specialized journal, small conference, or departmental presentation?
 - d. Who will be reviewing your abstract?
- 2. What is the larger goal or hypothesis of your work?** The hypothesis or a similar statement of purpose should be highlighted within the first few sentences. This does not need to be in the traditional “If...then...” or “We hypothesize...” format, but should be easy to recognize.
- 3. Why is this work important? What is the intellectual merit of your work?** An abstract is a brief summary of your work. Major experimental or intellectual findings should be *clearly* highlighted. Think about the hypothesis or statement of purpose. What experimental or intellectual findings prove or disprove the hypothesis? These findings are the meat of the abstract and should be presented in a concise, descriptive manner. Keep the audience in mind and discuss findings in the appropriate tone and jargon.
 - a. What are the major findings or highlights of your work?
 - b. What aspects of your work make it unique, important and relevant?
- 4. What is the broader significance of your work?** Readers should have a basic understanding of why the discussed experimental or intellectual findings are significant. For example, major paradigm shift findings will have broad significance. These findings will typically be published or presented across disciplines. Here, a broad degree of significance should be discussed. Conversely, discoveries or interpretations that are unique to a specific field

or sub-field will have less broad significance. Field specific findings will typically be published or presented within one or two disciplines. Here, significance will be restricted to a particular field. Again, keep your audience in mind and discuss your findings in the appropriate tone and jargon.

- a. How do your findings impact the academic community most relevant to your field?
- b. If presenting a major finding, how will this work affect the trajectory of the academic or research community most relevant to your work?