UNIVERSITY WRITING PROGRAM

# Features of a Good Abstract

An abstract is a summary of a piece of academic writing. The abstract appears in multiple locations, including at the start of a publication, in conference proceedings, and in electronic databases. Readers typically use the abstract to decide whether or not to read your paper or attend your talk.

## Features of a Good Abstract

* Summarizes the entire paper, usually in one paragraph
* Usually about 150-300 words
* Typically written in the past tense and mostly in the third person
* Entirely new text (not cut and pasted from the paper)
* Stands alone—the reader can understand the abstract on its own
* Includes keywords; only includes critical references; usually does not include graphics
* Has concise, clear, specific (not vague), carefully edited language
* Understands the audience: what does the reader know?
* Is not misleading; acknowledges when findings are preliminary

## Structure of a Good Abstract

In science, the abstract should include a few sentences from each of the following sections:

* *Introduction:* the goal of the study, crucial background
* *Methods:* basic study design
* *Results:* summary of major findings
* *Discussion:* Interpretations, conclusions, broader implications, future research

Importantly, this same format can apply to abstracts written in disciplines outside the sciences:

* Introduction = the state of the field and/or the gap your research is filling
* Method = Describing what you did to develop your argument
* Results = A statement of the thesis
* Discussion = The larger implications of your findings

Credit: Elissa Jacobs, University Writing Program, 2020.

The Brandeis University Writing Program, including the Writing Center, First-Year Writing, and Writing in the Majors, offers support for writing throughout the community, including undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff.

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