

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.

For more information, see www.brandeis.edu/UWP or write to UWP@brandeis.edu.