

# WRITING A RESEARCH ABSTRACT

## What is an abstract?

An abstract outlines your paper/thesis. It appears at the start of a document and is often the first thing people read about your research. It is important to make a good first impression with a clear summary.

The length varies depending on use. A call for papers could ask for 150 or 300 words. For a thesis it can be one to two paragraphs. Always check for submission details before you begin writing.

### TIP

The strength of your abstract can impact on how many times your paper/thesis is downloaded. You need to emphasise the significance of your research.

## When would you need to write an abstract?

An abstract can be used:

- as a summary of your report or paper, placed at the beginning of a document,
- to submit for a conference, to be accepted to present,
- to submit to a journal, so your paper or chapter can be published, or
- as a summary of your thesis/ dissertation.

### TIP

The abstract should include any keywords that relate to your research.

## How do you start writing an abstract?

Begin by writing dot point answers to the following questions and then elaborate on them...

- What did you research?
- Why did you research this topic?
- What is your main argument?
- How did you conduct your research?
- What were your findings?
- Why is your research significant?

## How do you structure an abstract?

- **Welcoming** sentence (grab your audience's attention and introduce the general topic)
- **Problem** (outline the issue that you are exploring)
- **Thesis** statement or hypothesis (form a main argument in one sentence)
- **Methods** (list the methods you are using and perhaps any key theorists you will be referring to throughout)
- **Outline** of what is to come (explain the structure – you can base this on the subheadings of your document)
- **Outcome** of research (what were your findings? Or what key themes came out of the research?)
- **Significance** of findings (reinforce your main argument and how your research fills a gap)

You can vary the structure, depending on your discipline, but use this as a guide to begin your writing.

## What language do you use?

- Use the past tense to refer to what you did and what you found at each stage of the research.
- Use the present tense to comment on the significance of your research findings.
- Use active verbs wherever possible, for example, 'the study tested' instead of 'it was tested by the study'.

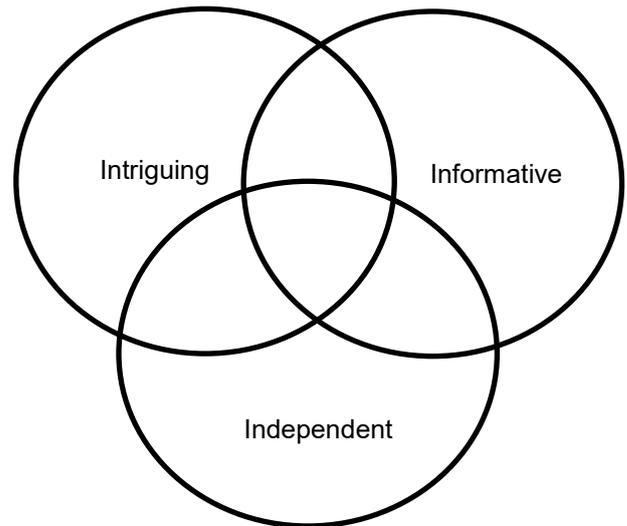
### TIP

An abstract should vary from your introduction in wording, even though it covers a lot of the same content.

## Things to avoid:

- Do not use too much jargon. It should be academic but also easily understood by readers not directly in your field.
- Do not use too many references. One or two are ok if you really need to. However, many abstracts have none.
- Do not start your abstract with your thesis statement.
- Do not over explain how you conducted the research — just outline the key methods used.
- Do not go too deeply into the results of the research. It should only be a summary of the findings.

## The abstract should be:



An abstract should create intrigue for the reader. It should be an informative summary of your paper. It should be able to be read independently from the paper and still communicate clearly what the main argument is and what the outcomes were.

### TIP

If the abstract is for a conference then use keywords from the call for papers to show how your research relates to the conference themes.

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