

Guidelines on Writing Good Abstracts

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ABSTRACT

The abstract is a critical component of any scholarly work, serving as a concise summary that provides readers with an overview of the research's purpose, methods, key findings, and significance. A well-written abstract not only helps researchers disseminate their work effectively but also assists readers in quickly assessing the relevance and quality of a paper. This paper aims to provide a guide on writing good abstracts, with a focus on the structure, content, and strategies that ensure clarity and effectiveness.

Keywords: writing abstract, structure of abstract

INTRODUCTION

A well-crafted abstract is a crucial component of any scholarly work, providing a concise summary of the research's purpose, methods, key findings, and significance. (Slade, 1997). It serves as the gateway to the author's work, capturing the attention of potential readers and compelling them to explore the full text.

There is no consensus among scholars on the exact amount of words that an abstract should have. However, many agree on a word length of 150 to 250, whereas Tullu (2019) recommends for 200 – 300 words. However, the word length may also depend on the publication requirements.

The abstract is in form of a paragraph which expresses the thesis, key points and any application of the research being discussed. This expresses the thesis' key points and research application which aids in computer search access and allows readers to decide to read the entire dissertation. Therefore, a well-written abstract is important because it provides the readers with the essence of a research paper and encourages the reader to continue reading the full text. It also prepares the readers for detailed information, analyses, and arguments, and helps the readers remember key points from the research paper.

Search engines and bibliographic databases also use abstracts, as well as the title, to identify key terms for indexing the published paper. The contents in the abstract and in the title are crucial for helping other researchers find the subject research paper or article.

THE STRUCTURE OF AN ABSTRACT

Abstracts contain the below components in brief form though the body of the research paper will, develop and explain these ideas much more fully.

Title

The title of the abstract is short, concise, descriptive and representative of the whole content in the research. The title should avoid jargons and should not use abbreviations. It should be centered and placed at the top of the abstract.

INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND

The abstract should begin with a brief introduction to the research problem or topic (Tullu, 2019). It should provide context to the readers to help readers understand the significance of the research work. The exact word to be used depends either on the author or journal requirements. One can either explain it as introduction or background depending on the journal requirements or author's preference.

Carole Slade in her book *Form and Style* informs that the background section is intended to be brief, providing a concise overview of the existing knowledge on the subject and highlighting the gaps of the study. Many scholars are in agreement to this including Tullu (2019) and Ishaq et al., (2023). The background should also clarify the purpose of the study or intention.

In many instances, the background section can be condensed into two to three sentences, each addressing different facets of the relevant information; occasionally, a single sentence can suffice. The purpose of the background is to furnish the reader with context for the study and lead smoothly into a description of the research methods. Some authors opt for longer background sections in their abstracts, which can be justified in specific cases. However, a lengthier background often leaves less space for presenting results, potentially reducing the engagement of the reader since readers are primarily interested in the paper's findings rather than its background (Rakhimova, 2023).

Purpose

Purpose is another component of the abstract. This should clearly state the research objectives or the research questions addressed in the specific study. The author should explain the importance of the research and should also explain its contribution to existing knowledge and literature (Rakhimova, 2023). The purpose can be a section on its own or it can be part of the background.

Methods

The methods section is usually the second-longest section in the abstract after the Results section. (Tullu, 2019). This contains enough information to enable the reader to understand what was done, and how. The method section addresses such questions as what is the research design, what is the sample size, what is the duration of the study and the sample methodology. (Tume et al., 2022; Rakhimova, 2023). It also includes details on data collection method used and analysis methods used in the study.

Findings/ Results

According to Tume et al. (2022), the results section is the most important part of the abstract and nothing should compromise its range and quality. This is because readers who peruse an abstract do so to learn about the findings of the study.

Tume et al. (2022) emphasizes that the most crucial aspect of an abstract is its results section, and nothing should detract from its comprehensiveness and quality. This is because abstract readers are primarily interested in learning about the study's discoveries. Consequently, the results segment should succinctly outline the primary findings and conclusions of the research, possibly utilizing quantitative data to bolster these findings. The results section should consequently take up the largest portion of the abstract and include as much detail about the findings as allowed by the journal's word limit.

The section may be called "results" or "findings" depending on the preference of the author or the publication requirements.

Conclusion

Similar to the results section, the conclusion segment is Significant as it encapsulates the key takeaway message of the study in a summarized articulated manner. Typically, the findings highlighted in this section pertains to the primary outcome measure; however, other important or unforeseen findings are also addressed in this section. The author may also offer opinion on the theoretical or practical implications of the findings, or the importance of the findings for the field. (Rakhimova, 2023). The author may also choose to mention the limitations of the study and potential for future research studies.

Despite its briefness, this section carries substantial weight with the average reader because readers generally trust authors and accept their statements as valid. Therefore, authors should refrain from overstating their data and keep honest conclusions.

Keywords

This section should be included just below the abstract and should only list relevant keywords that are used throughout the research paper. The keywords lists the most relevant terms used in the study and the same is normally placed directly below the abstract. These are the words that will make readers find the research paper easily through databases and search engines. Keywords can range between 5 to 10 important words or short phrases central to the research in both the abstract and the keywords section.

WHAT IS THE PROPORTION OF EACH SECTION ABOVE IN THE ABSTRACT

The proportion of each section above to the abstract varies, depending on the nature and genre of the paper that the author is summarizing in the abstract. And in some cases, these guidelines are given in the publication sites that one will be publishing his research paper.

WHAT TO AVOID IN WRITING ABSTRACT

Whilst writing abstracts, one should not cite references. The abstract should describe what the author has studied in his research and what the author has discovered and what is the researcher's argument and conclusion. Therefore, with this, there is no need for reference. The references can be cited in the body of the research paper where the author is reviewing various works to support his argument. Moreover, what this means is that one should not write whatever is not in the research paper in the abstract.

Abstract should also not contain abbreviations or complex words. It should be written simply.

The author should avoid long sentences and a lot of wordings when writing abstract. Thus, it is good to avoid giving too much information as it should make the reader want to read more and want to go into the content of the research paper.

WHEN TO WRITE ABSTRACT

Since the abstract is the first option of the article, researchers might be tempted to write their abstract first. However, it is advisable to write the abstract after drafting the entire document so that the author is aware of what he is summarizing.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is important for authors to know how to write a good abstract as this is the first thing a reader reads before he decides to read the full text. Though this is important majority of journals give authors detailed guidance

on the structure and content of the various sections of the submission. These guidelines frequently offer information on what should be included in each section of an abstract. Therefore, in the end, a good abstract will be one in which the authors customize it to meet the particular specifications of the publication to which they intend to submit their work.

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