

How to Write an Abstract

An abstract usually acts as a summary of work already completed and is used by prospective readers to decide whether or not to read the entire text. A conference abstract is an abstract that you submit for consideration to present a paper at a professional conference. It functions independently from the paper it is based on (since the conference review committee will see it and not your actual paper). Thus, your primary audience for the conference abstract is the conference review committee. The conference participants -- to whom you will actually deliver your paper -- are your secondary audience. In addition to impressing the conference reviewing committee, your purpose in writing a conference abstract is to create a "research space" from which to write/present and to appeal to as large an audience as possible.

An abstract should represent as much as is possible the quantitative and qualitative information in the document, and also reflect its reasoning. It is important that you spend some time thinking and drafting your abstract since the quality of these documents is often solely responsible for whether or not your paper is accepted to a conference. Your abstract is literally a "first impression" to your reader/audience, one that you want to make positively.

Abstracts submitted to the MEA should fit on to one page and must include your name with affiliation, coauthor's names and affiliations, title of the paper, and JEL code of the paper with sub classification numbers if possible.

Abstracts

Typically, an abstract answers these questions in 100-250 words:

- *Why did you do this study or project?*
- *What did you do and how?*
- *What did you find?*
- *What do your findings mean?*

If your paper is about a new method or apparatus, the last two questions might be changed to:

- *What are the advantages (of the method or apparatus)?*
- *How well does it work?*

Some points to keep in mind while writing abstracts:

- While drafting your abstract: look over your subject to see what disciplinary assumptions are challenged; question the significance of your ideas; emphasize the important results and address limitations in a realistic manner.

- An abstract will nearly always be read along with the title, so do not repeat or rephrase your title. It will likely be read without the rest of the document, however, so make it complete enough to stand on its own.
- Your readers expect you to summarize your conclusions in an abstract, as well as your purposes, methods and main findings. Emphasize the different points of your study in proportion to the emphasis they receive in the body of the document.
- *DO NOT refer in the abstract to information that is not in the document.* This is very important and is a little like "truth in advertising." You do not want to give your reader the impression that your study covers information it does not actually contain.
- Avoid using the first person "I" or "we." In addition, whenever possible, choose active verbs instead of passive ones (ex: use "*the study tested*" instead of "*it was tested by the study*" or "*I tested in the study*").
- Avoid, if possible, using trade names, acronyms, abbreviations or symbols in your abstract. You would have to explain these names which would take up valuable room/words.
- Use non-evaluative language in your abstract; *report* instead of *comment* upon your findings.
- Use key words from the document to help indexers more accurately index your document for future research.
- Ease your readers/audience into your topic. Or, in other words, be sensitive to the needs and knowledge of your audience. What might seem perfectly obvious to you after working on a longer writing or research project will often be brand-new to your audience.
- Don't procrastinate! It is best to write the abstract immediately after you finish your project while the ideas are still fresh in your mind.

Remember, a well written abstract often can ensure wide publication since many computerized databases and printed indexes reprint abstracts so scholars can keep up with each other's work, and associations and corporations often publish abstracts in given fields and mail them to appropriate researchers and scholars, etc. Thus, if you want to ensure that your work has an impact on your field, you should work as hard as possible in presenting a precise and engaging abstract.

© 2006 - 2008 University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Monday, 11-Jun-2012 12:02:04 PDT