

ABSTRACTS

An abstract is a short (usually one-paragraph) summary of a paper, proposal, or thesis. It gets printed at the beginning of your paper, usually between the title page and your introduction, but it should usually be the part you write **last**. The abstract tells the reader exactly what is in your paper, and most writers don't know this for sure until the paper is actually finished.

In professional writing, the abstract is the only part of your paper that most people will see. It lets other researchers decide whether your article addresses the topics they are interested in and whether your ideas and research seem credible enough that they should read further.

There are two kinds of abstract. A **descriptive** abstract, which is rarely used, can be between a few sentences and a paragraph long (check with your instructor). Using all your topic's keywords, it explains what a paper is **about** and it gives an overview of its methodology and the topics it covers. It does not outline its argument or thesis.

More often, however, you'll be asked to write an **informative** abstract that sums up a paper's argument and evidence. These abstracts often have strict word-count limits, although assignments vary. Abstracts of a ten- to twenty- page paper are often about three-quarters of a (double-spaced) page long.

Informative abstracts often start with one sentence that sums up the paper's main point. After that, the paper's other major points can be presented in the same order they appear in the paper. (This is what makes your abstract different from a summary: a summary does not usually follow the order of the original). Your abstract should include

- a statement of the problem your research addresses and why it is important.
- the methods or approach you used
- any major limitations affecting your research
- your results or findings
- the implications of your results or findings.

Your abstract should include all the major keywords and phrases that someone interested in your topic might use in searching for your paper. It should be written in the same kind of language that you use for your paper itself: if the language in your paper is technical, the language in your abstract should be technical too. The abstract must present your paper's major points directly, instead of writing **about** them:

NOT "this paper discusses the effect of parental involvement on second-graders' success"

BUT "second-grade students whose parents spent at least two hours a week on school-related activities had test scores 12% higher than those whose parents did not."