

# How to Write an Abstract for Your Paper

An abstract is a self-contained summary of a larger work, such as research and scientific papers or general academic papers. Usually situated at the beginning of such works, the abstract is meant to “preview” the bigger document. This helps readers and other researchers find what they’re looking for and understand the magnitude of what’s discussed.

Like the trailer for a movie, an abstract can determine whether or not someone becomes interested in your work. Aside from enticing readers, abstracts are also useful organizational tools that help other researchers and academics find papers relevant to their work.

## **What’s the purpose of an abstract?**

The main purpose of an abstract is to help people decide whether or not to read the entire academic paper. After all, titles can be misleading and don’t get into specifics like methodology or results. Imagine paying for and downloading a hundred-page dissertation on what you believe is relevant to your research on the Caucasus region—only to find out it’s about the other Georgia.

Abstracts are also incredibly useful for indexing. They make it easier for researchers to find precisely what they need without wasting time skimming actual papers. And because abstracts sometimes touch on the results of a paper, researchers and students can see right away if the paper can be used as evidence or a citation to support their own theses.

## **How long should an abstract be?**

Abstracts are typically 150–200 words and include one or two paragraphs.

## **What to include in an abstract**

As part of a formal document, informative abstracts adhere to more scientific and data-based structures. Like the paper itself, abstracts should include all of the IMRaD elements: **I**ntroduction, **M**ethods, **R**esults, and **D**iscussion.

This handy acronym is a great way to remember what parts to include in your abstract. There are some other areas you might need as well, which we also explain at the end.

## **Introduction**

The beginning of your abstract should provide a broad overview of the entire project, just like the thesis statement. You can also use this section of your abstract to write out your hypothesis or research question.

In the one or two sentences at the top, you should explain the purpose of your paper, such as what problem it attempts to solve and why the reader should be interested. You'll also need to explain the context around it, including any historical references.

### **Methods**

This section covers the methodology of your research, or how you collected the data. This is crucial for verifying the credibility of your paper—abstracts with no methodology or suspicious methods won't be taken seriously by the scientific community.

### **Results**

In one or two sentences, summarize the main points of your paper and the conclusion. Remember that the goal of most abstracts is to inform, so mentioning your results here can help others better classify and categorize your paper.

This is often the biggest section of your abstract. It involves most of the concrete details surrounding your paper, so don't be afraid to give it an extra sentence or two compared to the others.

### **Discussion**

The discussion section explains the ultimate conclusion and its ramifications. Based on the data and examination, what can we take away from this paper? The discussion section often goes beyond the scope of the project itself, including the implications of the research or what it adds to its field as a whole.

### **Tips for Writing Abstracts**

#### *1. Autonomous works*

Abstracts are meant to be self-contained, autonomous works. They should act as standalone documents, often with a beginning, middle, and end. The thinking is that, even if you never read the actual paper, you'll still understand the entire scope of the project just from the abstract.

#### *2. Write the abstract last*

Because the abstract comes first, it's tempting to write it first. However, writing the abstract at the end is more effective since you have a better understanding of what is actually in your paper. You'll also discover new implications as you write, and perhaps even shift the structure a bit. In any event, you're better prepared to write the abstract once the main paper is completed.

#### *3. Abstracts are not introductions*

A common misconception is to write your abstract like an introduction—after all, it's the first section

of your paper. However, abstracts follow a different set of guidelines, so don't make this mistake.

Abstracts are summaries, designed to encapsulate the findings of your paper and assist with organization and searchability. A good abstract includes background information and context, not to mention results and conclusions. Abstracts are also self-contained, and can be read independently of the rest of the paper.