

What is an Abstract?

An abstract is a short, and powerful statement that describes a larger work. An abstract of a social science or scientific work may contain the scope, purpose, results, and contents of the work. An abstract of a humanities work may contain the thesis, background, and conclusion of the larger work. An abstract is not a review, it does not evaluate the work being abstracted. It usually appears at the beginning of a larger work. Most often, the author of the entire work (or prospective work) writes the abstract.

Abstracts allow readers who may be interested in a longer work to quickly decide whether it is worth their time to read it.

When do people write abstracts?

- when submitting articles to journals, especially online journals
- when applying for research grants
- when writing a book proposal
- when completing the Ph.D. dissertation or M.A. thesis
- when writing a proposal for a conference paper
- when writing a proposal for a book chapter

Types of abstracts

There are two types of abstracts: descriptive and informative.

Descriptive abstracts

A descriptive abstract indicates the type of information found in the work. It makes no judgments about the work, nor does it provide results or conclusions of the research. Descriptive abstracts are usually very short—100 words or less.

Informative abstracts

The majority of abstracts are informative. They still do not evaluate a work, they do more than describe it. The writer presents and explains all the main arguments and the important results and evidence in the complete article/paper/book. An informative abstract includes the information that can be found in a descriptive abstract (purpose, methods, scope) but also includes the results and conclusions of the research and the recommendations of the author. The length varies according to discipline, but an informative abstract is rarely more than 10% of the length of the entire work. In case of a longer work, it may be much less.

All abstracts include:

- A full citation of the source, preceding the abstract.
- The most important information first.

- The same type and style of language found in the original, including technical language.
- Key words and phrases that quickly identify the content and focus of the work.
- Clear, concise, and powerful language.

How not to write an abstract:

- Do not refer extensively to other works.
- Do not add information not contained in the original work.
- Do not define terms.