Writing an Abstract

What is an abstract?

An abstract is a brief (usually no longer than 250 words) yet comprehensive summary of your paper. It concisely describes the aims and outcomes of your paper so readers know exactly what to expect. The abstract will be placed on a separate page right after the title page.

Abstracts differ by discipline, but in general they should explain the purpose of the work, methods used, results, and conclusions that can be drawn.

Consider the abstract as a self-contained piece of text. It's best to write the abstract after you're finished with the rest of the paper, but avoid copying and pasting too much directly from your essay.

One fairly reliable strategy is to write the abstract as a condensed version of your paper, using the structure as a guide. Many disciplines used the IMRAD format (introduction, methods, results, and discussion), so summarizing in 1-2 sentences each section will assist you in organizing your abstract. Here are questions to help with the structure.

- What is the problem? Outline the objective and/or research question(s).
- What has been done? Explained from the research methods.
- What did you discover? Summarize key findings and conclusions.
- What do the findings mean?

Basic Formatting

- Set page margins to 1 inch.
- Write "Abstract" at the top of the page (bold and centered).
- Content rules
    - Do not indent the first line.
    - Double-space text.
    - Use a legible font like Times New Roman (12 pt.)
- Additionally, you may be required to supply a list of 3-5 keywords directly below the content.
    - Indent the first line 0.5 inches.
    - Write the label "Keywords" in italics.
    - Write keywords in lowercase letters, separated with commas.

Other Tips and Strategies

- Use a reverse outline
  - There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to abstracts. If your research has a structure that different vastly from IMRAD, you can write your abstract through a process of reverse outlining.
  - For each chapter/section, list keywords and draft 1-2 sentences that summarize the central point or argument. The result is a framework for your abstract. Next, revise those sentences to make connections and show how the argument develops.

- Read other abstracts
  - The best way to learn any convention or genre of writing is to read other people's. Use any academic journal article's you've collected and used thus far as a framework for structure and style. Otherwise, visit Doane's library webpage and search through available journals and databases.

- Write clearly and concisely
  - A good abstract is concise but impactful, so avoid complicated syntax, unnecessary filler words, and obscure jargon. The abstract is the first thing readers consult after the title, and thus should be understandable to readers who are not familiar with your topic.

- Start strong, end strong
  - Think of an abstract as a mini essay. Your beginning should be a clear statement of your argument, and the end should be point to any conclusions reached and the direction future research might take. Either way, the beginning and end should be provocative and direct.

- Focus on your own research
  - Since an abstract is to report the original contributions of your research, avoid discussion of others' work, even if addressed at length in the main text.
  - You may situate your work within a broader debate by summarizing other scholarly work, but don't mention or reference specific publications. Likewise, don't include citations in an abstract unless absolutely necessary.

DOANE
UNIVERSITY