

How to write an abstract

Published on February 28, 2019 by [Shona McCombes](#). Revised on October 13, 2020.


An abstract is a short summary of a longer work (such as a [dissertation](#) or [research paper](#)). The abstract concisely reports the aims and outcomes of your research so that readers know exactly what the paper is about.

Write the abstract at the very end, when you've completed the rest of the text. There are four things you need to include:

1. Your [research problem](#) and [objectives](#)
2. Your [methods](#)
3. Your key [results](#) or arguments
4. Your [conclusion](#)

An abstract is usually around 150–300 words, but there's often a strict word limit, so make sure to check the requirements of the university or journal.

In a [dissertation or thesis](#), include the abstract on a separate page, after the [title page](#) and [acknowledgements](#) but before the [table of contents](#).

 **Table of contents****How to Write a Clear & Concise Abstract | Scribbr** 

Abstract example

Hover over the different parts of the abstract to see how it is constructed.

Example of an abstract

UK environmental organizations currently face a significant funding gap. It is well-established that representations of individual victims are more effective than abstract concepts like climate change when designing fundraising campaigns. This study aims to determine how such representations can be better targeted in order to increase donations. Specifically, it investigates whether the perceived social distance between victims and potential donors has an impact on donation intention. In this context, social distance is defined as the extent to which people feel they are in the same social group (in-group) or another social group (out-group) in relation to climate change victims.

To test the hypothesis that smaller social distance leads to higher donation intention, an

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randomly divided into two conditions (large and small social distance) and asked to respond to one of two sets of fundraising material. Responses were analyzed using a two-sample t-test. The results showed a small effect in the opposite direction than hypothesized: large social distance was associated with higher donation intention than small social distance.

These results suggest that potential donors are more likely to respond to campaigns depicting victims that they perceive as socially distant from themselves. On this basis, the concept of social distance should be taken into account when designing environmental fundraising campaigns.

When to write an abstract

You will almost always have to include an abstract when writing a [thesis](#), [dissertation](#), [research paper](#), or submitting an article to an academic journal.

In all cases, the abstract is the very last thing you write. It should be a completely independent, self-contained text, not an excerpt copied from your paper or dissertation. An abstract should be fully understandable on its own to someone who hasn't read your full paper or related sources.

The easiest approach to writing an abstract is to imitate the structure of the larger work—think of it as a miniature version of your dissertation or research paper. In most cases, this means the abstract should contain four key elements.

What can proofreading do for your paper?

Scribbr editors not only correct grammar and spelling mistakes, but also strengthen your writing by making sure your paper is free of vague language, redundant words and awkward phrasing.

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Before

A striking resemblance has been seen between the study by Martynova and Renneboog (2010) it was almost equal between the US and the Netherlands success rate is approximately the 40%.

Results

After

(2019) found it already became clear that entries between the US and the Netherlands. This success rate of is approximately the 40%.

See editing example

Aims

Start by clearly defining the purpose of your research. What **practical or theoretical problem** does the research respond to, or what **research question** did you aim to answer?

You can include some brief context on the social or academic relevance of your topic, but don't go into detailed background information.

After identifying the problem, state the objective of your research. Use verbs like *investigate*, *test*, *analyze* or *evaluate* to describe exactly what you set out to do.

This part of the abstract can be written in the **present or past simple tense**, but should never refer to the future, as the research is already complete.

- ✗ This study will investigate the relationship between coffee consumption and productivity.
- ✓ This study investigates the relationship between coffee consumption and productivity.

Methods

Next, indicate the **research methods** that you used to answer your question. This part should be a straightforward description of what you did in one or two sentences. It is usually written in the past simple tense as it refers to completed actions.

- ✗ Structured interviews will be conducted with 25 participants.

- ✔ Structured interviews were conducted with 25 participants.

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methodology's strengths and weaknesses, but to give the reader a quick insight into the overall approach and procedures you used.

Results

Next, summarize the main [research results](#). This part of the abstract can be in the present or past simple tense.

- ✘ Our analysis has shown a strong correlation between coffee consumption and productivity.
- ✔ Our analysis shows a strong correlation between coffee consumption and productivity.
- ✔ Our analysis showed a strong correlation between coffee consumption and productivity.

Depending on how long and complex your research is, you may not be able to include all results here. Try to highlight only the most important findings that will allow the reader to understand your conclusions.

Conclusion

Finally, state the main [conclusions of your research](#): what is your answer to the problem or question? The reader should finish with a clear understanding of the central point that your research has proved or argued. Conclusions are usually written in the present simple tense.

- ✘ We concluded that coffee consumption increases productivity.
- ✔ We conclude that coffee consumption increases productivity.

If there are important limitations to your research (for example, related to your [sample size](#) or methods), you should mention them briefly in the abstract. This allows the reader to accurately assess the credibility and generalizability of your research.

If your aim was to solve a practical problem, the conclusions might include recommendations for implementation. If relevant, you can briefly make suggestions for further research.

Keywords

If your paper will be published, you might have to add a list of keywords at the end of the

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help potential readers find your paper during their own literature searches.

Be aware that some publication manuals, such as [APA Style](#), have specific [formatting requirements](#) for these keywords.

Tips for writing an abstract

It can be a real challenge to condense your whole dissertation into just a couple of hundred words, but the abstract will be the first (and sometimes only) part that people read, so it's important to get it right. These strategies can help you get started.

Reverse outline

Not all abstracts will contain precisely the same elements. If your research has a different structure (for example, a humanities dissertation that builds an argument through thematic chapters), you can write your abstract through a process of reverse outlining.

For each chapter or section, list keywords and draft 1-2 sentences that summarize the central point or argument. This will give you a framework of your abstract's structure. Next, revise the sentences to make connections and show how the argument develops.

The abstract should tell a condensed version of the whole story, and it should only include information that can be found in the main text. Reread your abstract to make sure it gives a clear summary of your overall argument.

Read other abstracts

The best way to learn the conventions of writing an abstract in your discipline is to read other people's. You probably already read lots of journal article abstracts while conducting your [literature review](#)—try using them as a framework for structure and style.

You can also find lots of dissertation abstract examples in [thesis and dissertation databases](#).

Write clearly and concisely

A good abstract is short but impactful, so make sure every word counts. Each sentence should clearly communicate one main point.

Avoid unnecessary filler words, and avoid obscure jargon—the abstract should be

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If you're struggling to edit down to the required length, read our guide to [shortening an abstract](#).

Focus on your own research

The purpose of the abstract is to report the original contributions of your research, so avoid discussion of others' work, even if you address it at length in the main text.

You might include a sentence or two summarizing the scholarly background to situate your research and show its relevance to a broader debate, but there's no need to mention specific publications. Don't include [citations](#) in an abstract unless absolutely necessary (for example, if your research responds directly to another study or revolves around one key theorist).

Check your formatting

If you are writing a thesis or dissertation or submitting to a journal, there are often specific formatting requirements for the abstract—make sure to check the guidelines and format your work correctly. For [APA research papers](#) you can follow the [APA abstract format](#).

Always stick to the word limit. If you have not been given any guidelines on the length of the abstract, write no more than one double-spaced page.

Checklist: Abstract

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- The word count is within the required length, or a maximum of one page.
- The abstract appears after the [title page](#) and [acknowledgements](#) and before the [table of contents](#).
- I have clearly stated my [research problem](#) and objectives.
- I have briefly described my [methodology](#).
- I have summarized the most important [results](#).

I have stated my main conclusions.

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I have mentioned any important limitations and recommendations.

The abstract can be understood by someone without prior knowledge of the topic.

Frequently asked questions about abstracts

What is the purpose of an abstract? 

How long is a dissertation abstract? 

When should I write the abstract? 

Can you cite sources in an abstract? 

Where does the abstract go in a thesis or dissertation? 

Is this article helpful?

1267

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Shona McCombes

Shona has a bachelor's and two master's degrees, so she's an expert at writing a great thesis. She has also worked as an editor and teacher, working with students at all different levels to

improve their academic writing.

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Other students also liked

How to write a dissertation introduction

The introduction leads the reader into your dissertation. It should describe the topic, focus, importance, and objectives of your research.

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Shorten your abstract or summary

You can shorten your abstract by not using excessively long sentences. Avoiding the following five things is an easy way to make your text more concisi...

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How to write a literature review

A literature review is a survey of scholarly knowledge on a topic. It is used to identify trends, debates, and gaps in the research.

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2 comments

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Diane Rutherford · October 31, 2020 at 7:21 PM

Do I need to write an abstract if I'm doing a one page research paper on diversity and inclusion in my current work place?

[Reply](#)

Shona McCombes (Scribbr Team) · November 5, 2020 at 11:26 AM

Hi Diane,

It's very unlikely that you'd need an abstract for a one-page paper. An abstract is generally only required for longer texts (such as theses and dissertations) and for papers published in academic journals. In the latter case, the journal's submission guidelines should clearly state any rules about the abstract.

Hope that helps!

[Reply](#)

Still have questions?

Let us know what's missing from this article

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