

Concretizing the Abstract

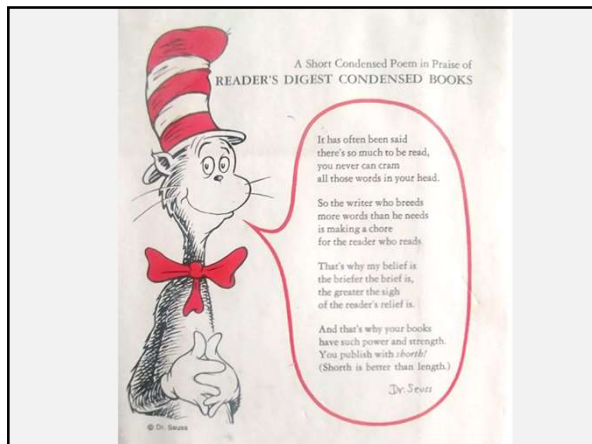
'And that's why your books, have such power and strength. You publish with *shorth!* (Shorth is better than length.)' -- Dr. Seuss

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Why Abstracts?





Agenda

1. Connecting Abstracts to good writing principles
2. Abstract Purpose
3. Abstract Examples
4. Abstract Approaches

What characteristics of scholarly work make you enjoy reading them?

Strong Writing Characteristics

1. Engaging word choice
2. Active Voice
3. Subject, verb, object structure
4. Concrete ideas or abstract ideas explained concretely
5. Complex ideas explained clearly
6. Supported claims
7. Concise writing

“Most readers who come across your article will see only the title and *abstract*, so make them good” (Silvia, 2007, p. 81).

Why do we write abstracts?

Purpose

“The purpose of a scholarly abstract is not merely to summarize an article’s content but to persuade one’s discipline-based peers that the research is important, and the article is therefore worth reading.”

—Stylish Academic Writing, Helen Sword

Policy in higher education suggests that curriculum should be more responsive to economist arguments than was the case in the past. Although some guidance has been given to how to develop more work-integrated curricula, little attention has been given to interactions in meetings between workplace and academic representatives in which issues of curriculum development are discussed. As such, there appears to be a gap in current curriculum theory. The author suggests that such interactions may be fruitfully examined using concepts derived from studies in the sociology of science and organizational dynamics. Such analyses may contribute to understanding what conditions enable productive interactions, which may be the development of hybrid objects and languages which speak to both groupings.

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How can faculty in professionally oriented fields engage in more productive conversation about course and curriculum design with the people who will eventually hire their students?

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The Writer's Diet

be-verbs
zombie nouns
prepositions
ad-words
it, this, that, there

HEART ATTACK!
This document has 117 eligible words.

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The authors investigated whether students who selectively volunteer for a study of prison life possess dispositions associated with behavior abusively. Students were recruited for a psychological study of prison life using a virtually identical newspaper ad as used in the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE: Haney, Banks & Zimbardo, 1973) or for a psychological study, an identical ad minus the words of prison life. Volunteers for the prison study scored significantly higher on measures of the abuse-related dispositions of aggressiveness, authoritarianism, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and social dominance and lower on empathy and altruism, two qualities inversely relative to aggressive abuse...Implications for interpreting the abusiveness of American military guards at Abu Ghraib Prison also are discussed.

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performance, and the uniquely intensive demands that advanced written composition place on working memory to make this case. A major impediment to assigning enough writing tasks is the time and effort involved in grading papers to provide feedback. We close by considering possible solutions to the grading problem.

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The development of advanced writing skills has been neglected in schools of the United States, with even some college graduates lacking the level of ability required in the workplace (National Commission on Writing, 2003, 2004). The core problem, we argue, is an insufficient degree of appropriate task practice distributed throughout the secondary and higher education curriculum. We draw on the power law of skill acquisition, the role of deliberate practice in expert performance, and the uniquely intensive demands that advanced written composition place on working memory to make this case. A major impediment to assigning enough writing tasks is the time and effort involved in grading papers to provide feedback. We close by considering possible solutions to the grading problem.

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FLABBY
This document has 114 eligible words.

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Summary: Abstract Recommendations...

1. Clear, well structured sentences (nouns and verbs are close together)
2. At least a few concrete nouns and verbs
3. Human elements (first-person pronouns, real people)
4. A contestable thesis or argument

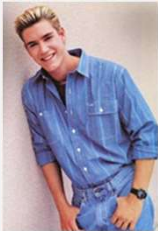
Abstract Types – 3 Main Divisions

TRADITIONAL	SPECIALIZED
Summary Abstract	Results Driven
1-2 sentence synopses of each section of a paper	Focuses on research findings and what they mean
Indicative	Informative
Describes what was done (process oriented)	Focuses on main findings (end product oriented)
Descriptive	Argument Driven
1-2 sentence synopses of each section of a paper	Focuses on the core argument driving the research or theoretical exploration

How to Approach the writing of an abstract

3 Strategies for Approaching Abstract Writing

- 1. Reverse Outlining (the Top Down approach)
- 2. The 5 Rhetorical Moves ... with Bonus Templates
- 3. The 6 Question Approach



"Abstracts function precisely as wallet size photos did: Whatever is portrayed in the big image of your manuscript appears in the smaller image ... if you already have developed the main text, it's easy to generate the miniature" – Pat Goodson



Approach 1: A "Reverse Outline" Abstract in 20 minutes

First 10 minutes

1. Consult your paper
2. Format your abstract to mirror the same structure of your manuscript (e.g., introduction, purpose, methods, results, conclusion)
3. In your paper, highlight each paragraph's key sentence

Approach 1: A "Reverse Outline" Abstract in 20 minutes

Second 10 minutes

1. Select several 1-2 key sentences from each section.
2. Copy and paste them into the appropriate sections of your abstract
3. Revise for flow, connections, and removal of redundancies
4. Edit for word count and other restrictions

Note: the goal is not having to rewrite. Your abstract will be consistent with your paper.

"A good abstract is like writing a haiku. It is very tightly constrained and you have to accomplish a lot in a very small amount of space. Simplicity is a key watchword." – Mark Pedretti

Approach 2: The Rhetorical approach (with templates!)

Rhetorical Moves	Examples
Move 1) Introduces the situation or problem. The argument of the centrality of your topic. It can be a question.	_____ is fundamental to _____ _____ is of interest because _____ Central to the discipline of _____ is _____ Why have we not yet solved the problem of _____?
Move 2) Explain the purpose of the research	This research investigates _____ We analyzed _____ This study investigated the usefulness of _____ on _____ This paper assesses the significance of _____

Approach 2: The Rhetorical approach (with templates!)

Rhetorical Function	Examples
Move 3) Describes the methods, material & procedures	We used a mixed methodological approach to _____ This study used a qualitative case study approach to investigate _____ Data was collected by _____
Move 4) Present the findings, usually 1-2 key takeaways	We found _____ The data indicated that _____ The results suggest that _____ Overall, these results show that _____

Approach 2: The Rhetorical approach (with templates!)

Rhetorical Function	Examples
Move 5) Discuss implications. This is the "so what?" of your research.	These results have implications for _____ The theoretical implication of these findings is that _____ These findings lead to significant policy recommendations including _____ Taken together these results suggest that _____ Future work should consider _____

The 6 Questions!

- Question 1: What's the topic?
- Question 2: What is the problem that you tackled in this paper?
- Question 3: Why has no one else adequately answered this question yet?
- Question 4: How did *you* tackle this research question?
- Question 5: How did you go about doing the research that follows from your big idea?
- Question 6: What's the key impact of your research? (i.e., What does it all mean? Why should people care?)

FAQs about Abstracts

And one that SHOULD be asked!

How long is an abstract?

- 150-300 words
- Depends on the journal or university requirement

What tense do I write an abstract?

- There is no one “rule” but tenses usually switch within
- Most commonly:
 - **Present** or **Present Perfect** tense for opening statements (e.g., Writing has been an important aspect of school curriculum)
 - **Past tense** for methods and results.
 - **Present tense** for conclusions.

Can I use first person in the abstract?

- Yes.
- Often will be in the forms of:
 - We observed ...
 - We discuss ...
 - We conclude ...
- From a writing point of view: Do it! Adds pace, makes abstracts shorter
- Important Caveat: Depends on the discipline/source

How do I seek useful feedback on my abstract?

3 KEY Questions

1. Do you understand what my research is about?
2. Do you understand why my research is important?
3. Does my abstract make you want to keep reading?

Questions?

Thank you!

Abstract, from the Latin abstractum,
which means a condensed form
of a longer piece of writing.

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