UHCL | Writing Center
Academic Affairs

Tips for Writing an Abstract

An abstract is a stand-alone document that briefly states the essential information of a paper, article, document, or book. Before you begin, review specific requirements for abstracts from your instructor and in your chosen documentation style. The abstract should be the last part written before a work is submitted.

Types of Abstracts

Informative Abstracts:

This is commonly used in the life sciences, engineering, or psychology. An informative abstract gives the reader a sense of the major picture of a document without including the details. A sentence or two should be devoted to each major section of the paper. Sentences should cover the problem, hypothesis, method, results, and conclusions. The abstract is like a mini paper or report. It answers the same questions as the paper itself:

- What was done?
- Why was it done?
- How was it done?
- What was found?
- What is the significance of the findings?

Length: 200-250 words

Descriptive Abstracts:

This is commonly used in the social sciences or humanities. A descriptive abstract presents a general view of the paper's purpose, subject, and scope while leaving out the results and conclusions. The abstract is like a book description that tells you what the book is about without spoiling the major plot points. It will answer these questions:

- What was done?
- Why was it done?
- How was it done?

Length: 50-100 words

Quick Tips for Writing an Abstract:

- Communicate a crucial piece of information in every sentence.
- Use active voice as much as possible.
- Do not include lengthy examples, tables, or supporting details.
- Never include information that doesn't appear in your paper.
- Revise the draft to be smooth and stand alone; the abstract itself should be a mini-essay.

Adapted from:

Porush, David. A Short Guide to Writing about Science. New York: HarperCollins, 1995. The Writing Centers at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Arkansas State, and University of Adelaide