

Writing the Abstract

The primary purpose of an abstract is to guide readers.

An abstract concisely highlights or reviews the major points covered along with the content and scope of the writing.

An abstract can also be a useful tool for **writers** to check that they have a clear grasp of their thesis and argument. If the writer can state the thesis and argument clearly in a few sentences—and in such a way that **someone who doesn't know the subject** will still be able to understand the main idea—then the writer knows he/she has a good grasp of the ideas he/she is trying to express. An abstract says everything of central importance in a way that gives the reader a clear overview of what is contained in the essay.

Essential elements of the abstract are:

Maximum word count 300 words – DO NOT GO OVER!!!

Three paragraph format

1st Paragraph

- 75 to 100 words in length
- Must include the Research Question & Thesis
- Must outline the purpose and method of the paper

2nd Paragraph

- 100 to 125 words in length
- Cover the scope of the investigation
- Detail limits and boundaries of your research
- What are you going to prove in your EE
- Outline key resources consulted

3rd Paragraph

- 50 to 75 words
- Outline the conclusion reached in your EE

An abstract should include the few things you would like your reader to remember long after the details of your paper may be forgotten.

Qualities of a Good Abstract

- Well developed paragraphs are unified, coherent, concise, and able to stand alone
- Uses an introduction/body/conclusion structure which presents the extended essay
- Follows strictly the chronology essay
- Provides logical connections (or transitions) between the information included
- Adds no new information, but simply summarizes the report
- Is understandable to a wide audience
- Oftentimes uses passive verbs to downplay the author and emphasize the information

Steps to Writing Effective Abstracts

Reread your extended essay with the goal of abstracting in mind. Look specifically for these main parts of the essay. Write a rough draft without looking back at what you're abstracting. **Don't merely copy key sentences** from the extended essay: you'll put in too much or too little information. Don't rely on the way material was phrased in the extended essay: **summarize information in a new way.**

Revising

If you notice differences between the latest version of your abstract and your latest draft of your EE, but are not sure how to reconcile the two, speak to your mentor. If you have a clear and coherent abstract, and if the paper actually corresponds to it, then you can be confident that your extended essay is probably clear and coherent as well.

Revise your rough draft to

- Correct weaknesses in organization.
- Improve transitions from point to point.
- Drop unnecessary information.
- Add important information you left out.
- Eliminate wordiness.
- Fix errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Voice

Students have grappled for years over the appropriate way to talk about their extended essays: should it be

"We measured ion concentration in the blood"

Or

"Ion concentration in the blood was measured"?

Markers prefer the active voice. Abstracts are often an exception, but only if the passive voice reduces the total number of letters and words.

Don'ts

- Do not commence with "this paper...", "this report..." or similar. It is better to write about the research than about the paper.
- Do not explain the sections or parts of the paper.
- Avoid sentences that end in "...is described", "...is reported", "...is analyzed" or similar.
- Do not begin sentences with "it is suggested that..." "it is believed that...", "it is felt that..." or similar. In every case, the four words can be omitted without damaging the essential message.
- Do not repeat or rephrase the title.
- Do not refer in the abstract to information that is not in the document.
- If possible, avoid trade names, acronyms, abbreviations, or symbols. You would need to explain them, and that takes too much room.

The abstract should be about the research, not about the act of writing.