
How to write a good abstract

for a scientific paper or conference presentation

What is an abstract?

The abstract of a paper is

- the only part of the paper that is published in conference proceedings.
- the only part of the paper that a potential referee sees when he is invited by an editor to review a manuscript.
- the only part of the paper that readers see when they search through electronic databases such as PubMed.



The Iceberg theory

“If a writer of a prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them.

The dignity of movement of the iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water” -- Hemingway, [*Death in the Afternoon*](#)



Structure

Most journals require abstracts to conform to a formal structure:

- within a word count of, usually, 200–250 words;
- usual sections:

Background or Introduction

Methods

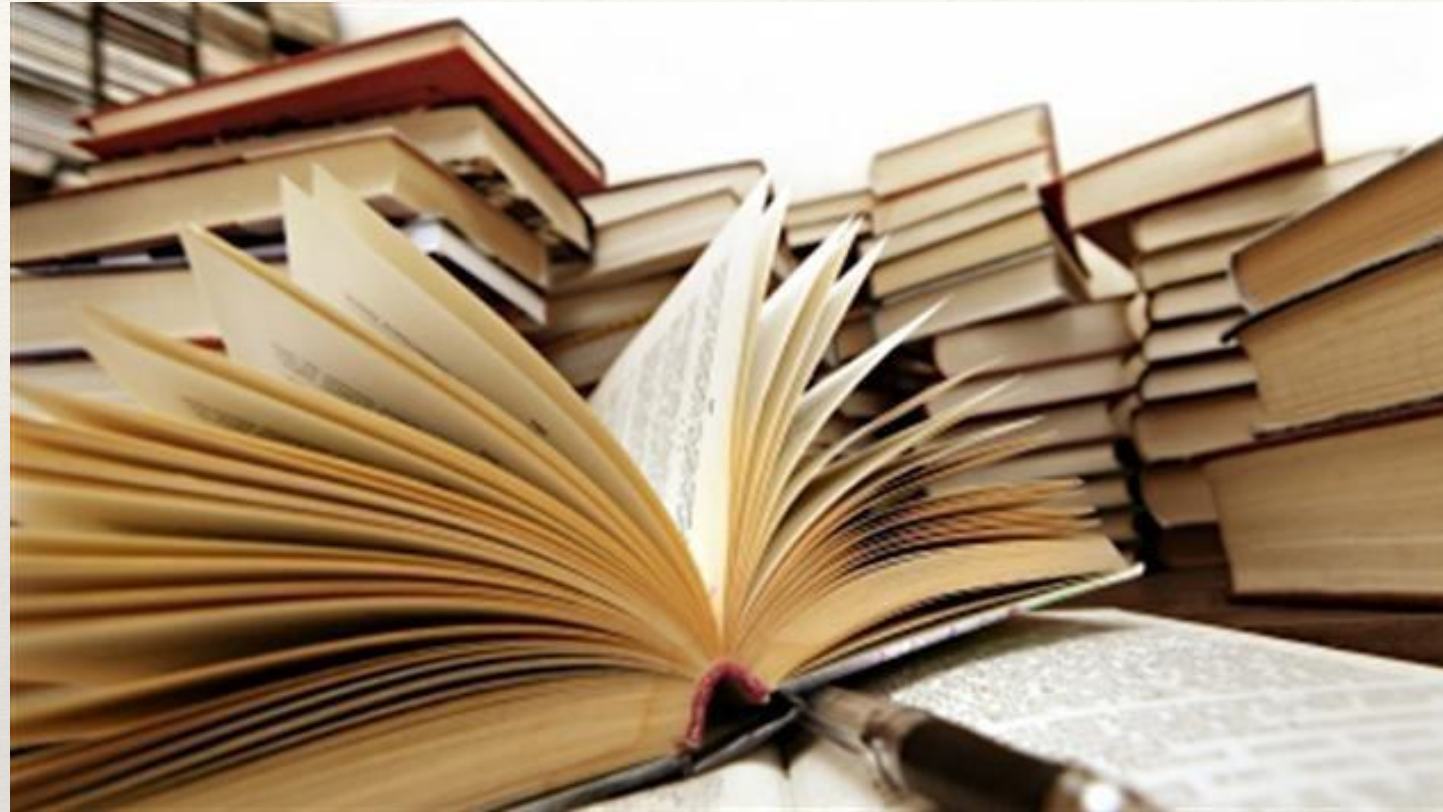
Abstract

Results or Findings

Conclusions

- Some journals include additional sections, such as Objectives (between Background and Methods) and Limitations (at the end of the abstract).

Introduction



- 1 What is already known about the subject, related to the paper in question
- 2 What is **NOT** known about the subject and hence what the study intended to examine (or what the paper seeks to present)
- 3 Keywords

Methods

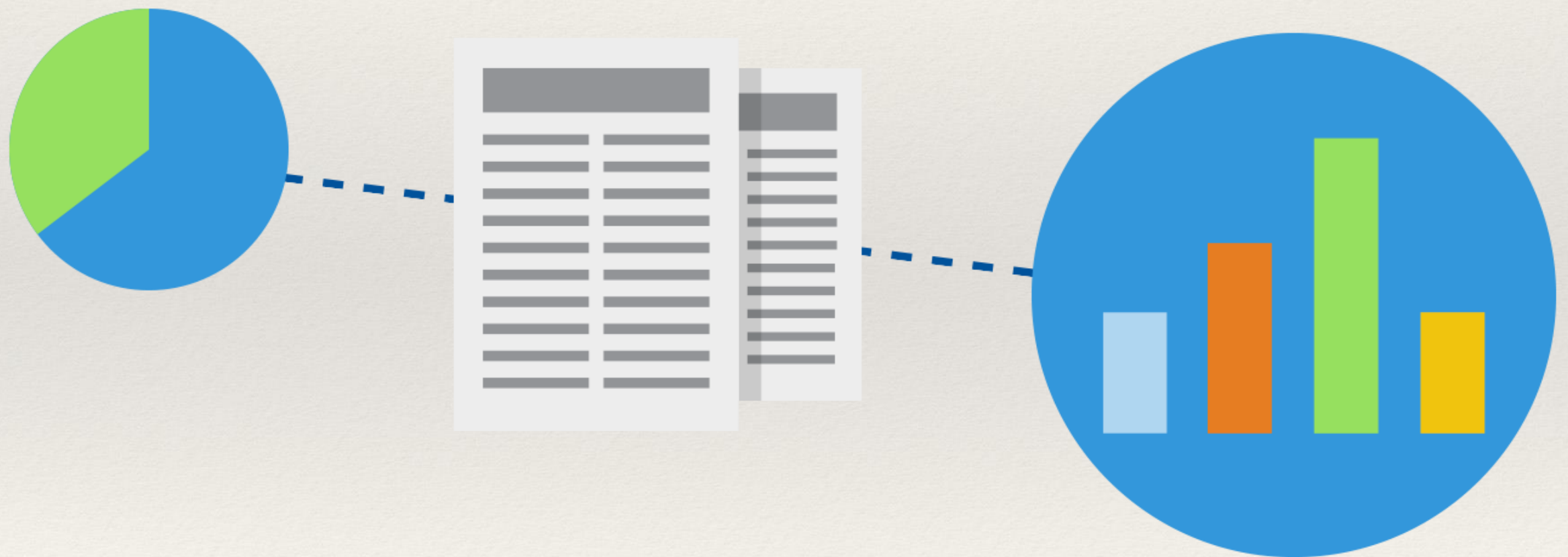
Methods sections generally provide information about important issues such as:

- ❖ sample size;
- ❖ domain;
- ❖ numbers of patients/users in different groups;
- ❖ kind of tests or tools used;
- ❖ duration of the study.



Results

This section should contain as much detail about the findings as the journal word count permits



Conclusions

Conclusions may contain three elements:

- 1 The primary take-home message
- 2 The additional findings of importance
- 3 The perspective (opening)

