Ten Steps to Writing an Effective Abstract

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An abstract is a condensed version of the manuscript, which highlights the major points covered, concisely describes its content and scope, and reviews its material in abbreviated form. It is usually the first section read and sets the tone of the paper for the reviewer. It must be concise and easy to read and must cover the important points of the paper.

Many publications have a required style for abstracts; the "Guidelines for Authors" provided by the publisher will provide specific instructions. Stay within the publisher's guidelines, or your manuscript might be rejected.

Writing an abstract involves summarizing a whole manuscript and providing as much new information as possible. The best way to write an effective abstract is to start with a draft of the complete manuscript and follow these 10 steps:

1. Identify the major objectives and conclusions.
2. Identify phrases with keywords in the methods section.
3. Identify the major results from the discussion or results section.
4. Assemble the above information into a single paragraph.
5. State your hypothesis or method used in the first sentence.
6. Omit background information, literature review, and detailed description of methods.
7. Remove extra words and phrases.
8. Revise the paragraph so that the abstract conveys only the essential information.
9. Check to see if it meets the guidelines of the targeted journal.
10. Give the abstract to a colleague (preferably one who is not familiar with your work) and ask him/her whether it makes sense.

Writing an effective abstract will improve the chances of your manuscript being accepted, encourage people to read it, and increase its impact.

A number of studies have indicated that a badly written manuscript with poor use of English, even with good science, has less chance of being accepted and published.