

EXAMPLES OF ABSTRACTS: GOOD, BAD, AND UGLY

Two examples of abstracts are provided here to provide some guidance for writing abstracts. Both abstracts are from published journals, but one is poorly written and the other is well written. Critiques are made for both to emphasize the writing style and type of information expected in a well written abstract.

A Poorly Written Abstract

Article Title: Elements of an Optimal Experience

Authors: Shall remain unnamed ☺

Abstract

This paper presents and assesses a framework for an engineering capstone design program. We explain how student preparation, project selection, and instructor mentorship are the three key elements that must be addressed before the capstone experience is ready for the students. Next, we describe a way to administer and execute the capstone design experience including design workshops and lead engineers. We describe the importance in assessing the capstone design experience and report recent assessment results of our framework. We comment specifically on what students thought were the most important aspects of their experience in engineering capstone design and provide quantitative insight into what parts of the framework are most important.

Critique:

- (1) This abstract begins well with a concise statement of the objectives of the paper, but then wanders from good technical writing style from there.
- (2) The abstract is written in the first person (e.g. “We explain...”, “We discuss...”, “We comment...”, etc.).
- (3) No results are presented. This poorly written abstract describes only the organization of the paper.

Example:

“Next, we describe... We comment specifically on what students thought were the most important aspects of their experience in engineering capstone design...”

Instead, the abstract should summarize the actual results and how they were obtained.

Example:

“A statistical analysis was performed on answers to survey questions posed to students enrolled in a capstone design course at Georgia Tech. The analysis showed that students thought the most important aspects of their experience in engineering capstone design were quality of the instructor and quantity of student/instructor interaction time.”

A Well Written Abstract

Article Title: Women Engineers in Kuwait: Perception of Gender Bias

Authors: P.A. Koushi, H.A. Al-Sanad, and A.M. Larkin of Kuwait University

Abstract

The greatest obstacle to the development of policies for the curtailment of gender bias is lack of information on the scope and effects of the problem. This study represents an attempt to quantify attitudes toward gender bias among professional women engineers working in the State of Kuwait. The major findings that emerged were as follows: a) Since 1970, Kuwait has witnessed an enormous growth rate in the participation of women in higher education. b) With respect to the job-related factors of salary scale, professional treatment, responsibility, benefits, and vacation, a clear majority (68%) of the professional Kuwaiti women engineers surveyed expressed a feeling of equality with or even superiority to their male counterparts. c) The one job-related factor in which significant gender bias was found to be in operation was that of promotion to upper management positions. In this criterion, the women engineers surveyed felt “less than equal” to their male colleagues.

Critique:

- (1) This abstract begins with a succinct statement of the problem and the objective of the paper.
- (2) Overall results are clearly presented.