

## How to Write an Abstract

### What is an abstract?

An abstract is a brief summary of a presenter's research, scholarly work, or creative activity, providing enough information for the potential audience to determine the relevance of the presentation to their interests – a sort of academic advertisement. An abstract succinctly covers the main points of a presentation and varies somewhat depending on the discipline. **Submitted abstracts should be directed to an audience of the presenter's peers and be formatted with discipline-appropriate components.**

In the empirical sciences, an abstract typically contains a hypothesis statement, the rationale for the hypothesis, method of testing the hypothesis, results including a few summary data with statistics, and conclusions. It should succinctly answer the three questions: What was done? How was it done? And, what was found out?

In the humanities, an abstract contains a thesis statement, brief background for thesis development, methods employed or approach taken, new insight gained, and conclusions drawn.

In the fine arts, there is no clear formula for an abstract. Typically abstracts in the fine arts contain background information, subject of the work, purpose or function of the work, audience, theories and methodologies employed, personal perspective, and meaning of the work.

An abstract is *not* a review. It is *not* an outline, nor a listing of ideas, nor a summary of the work of others. It usually does *not* reference the literature. Rather, it is self-contained and stands alone on its own merits as a new scholarly contribution. An abstract dwells on the main points of the scholarly presentation and the **central contribution** of the scholarly achievement. It typically ends with a concluding statement that gives coherence and synthesis.

*These guidelines were adapted from:*

*<http://www.pepperdine.edu/sccur2010/abstract-instructions.htm>,  
Southern California Conference for Undergraduate Research*

## **What are the components of a typical abstract in the sciences?**

*Hypothesis or question:* What problem are you trying to solve? What question are you pursuing? What idea are you testing?

*Rationale:* Why is your problem/question/idea important? What is the broader scope and significance of your project?

*Methods:* What methods did you employ or approach did you take to resolve your problem/question or to empirically test your idea? What was your experimental design and protocol?

*Results:* What did you find during the course of your scholarly work? Specifically, what new insight did you gain? What did you learn, create or discover that potentially advances your discipline?

*Principal conclusions:* Were your results consistent or inconsistent with your original hypothesis? How do your results inform your original question? What are the broader implications of your findings, especially as they relate to your original hypothesis or your question? What weaknesses or limitations remain? What are the original, creative contributions of your work to your discipline and how will your work potentially advance your field of specialization?

## **What are the components of a typical abstract in the humanities?**

*Topic:* What is the subject area in which you undertook your research?

*Question:* What is the problem or question that your research attempted to solve? What is its importance?

*Evidence:* What are the main bodies of evidence that you considered in approaching your question?

*Conclusions:* What did you conclude concerning your question?

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## What are the components of a typical abstract in the fine arts?

While there is no clear formula for a fine arts abstract, either visual or performing, below are some components that are frequently included. You do not need to have all of these components in your abstract. Please note that abstracts in fine arts are often written in first person.

*Necessary background information.*

*Subject of your body of work.*

*Purpose or function of your work.*

*Audience of your work.*

*Theories and methodologies that inform your work.*

*Personal perspective.*

*Meaning(s) of your work.*

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