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How to write abstracts

COMP1205 - Professional Development
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Week 3, Thurs 20th Oct, 2016
Session aim

To introduce the writing of abstracts in terms of:

- purpose
- content
- structure
The ‘shape’ of academic communication
The ‘Hourglass’ model

Source: Based on Swales (1993)
The ‘King’ model

Source: Based on Swales (1993)
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What is the function of an abstract?

a. To cite other studies related to your work

b. To explain the methodology of your work in detail

c. To concisely inform the world of your sheer genius

d. To summarise the overall aim or content of your work
Why are abstracts important?

a. A reader might only look at your abstract in deciding whether or not to read your work

b. Research databases use abstracts as the primary means of finding research reports on particular subjects

c. Abstracts are the main opportunity to grab the attention of the reader, and to show why your work is important or useful

d. They are an anagram of ‘crab stats’, and everyone loves crab statistics.
The ‘King’ model

Source: Based on Swales (1993)
Support resources for your academic skills

**My Courses**

Courses where you are: Student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>COMP6046-26502-13-14</td>
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<td>SST-05-06</td>
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Southampton University LibGuides:

Academic Skills: http://library.soton.ac.uk/sash/home

ECS MyLibrary: http://library.soton.ac.uk/ecs

Including your subject librarian Fiona Nichols
An “abstract is a miniature version of the whole. It is, if you like, a mini-me.”

Thomson (2016)
So, what are the functional parts of an abstract?

- Broader context
- Problem
- Solution and approach
- Results
- Contribution / So what?

See Koopman (1997) for a quick (1 page) guide to writing abstracts.
Publishing research results is an integral part of a researcher’s professional life. However, writing is not every researcher’s favourite activity, and getting a paper published can be a very tedious and time-consuming process. Fortunately, many of the obstacles along the writing and publishing path can be avoided by following some simple guidelines and practices. This paper presents a synthesis of guidelines found in literature about structuring and writing scientific papers. The paper outlines the process of publishing research papers in journals and conference proceedings, aiming to provide early-stage researchers with a handy introduction to essential issues. The paper takes an interdisciplinary stance by giving examples from technology-enhanced learning research and borrowing from literature in social, natural and computing sciences.
The first sentence addresses the broad context. This locates the study in a policy, practice or research field.

Publishing research results is an integral part of a researcher’s professional life.
However, writing is not every researcher’s favourite activity, and getting a paper published can be a very challenging and time-consuming process.

The second sentence establishes a problem related to the broad context you have set out. It often starts with But, Yet or However…
Solution and approach

The third sentence says what specific research has been done. This sentence often starts with ‘This research...’ or ‘I report...’

Fortunately, many of the obstacles along the writing and publishing path can be avoided by following some simple guidelines and practices. This paper presents a synthesis of guidelines found in literature about structuring and writing scientific papers.
Results

The fourth sentence reports the results. Don’t try to be too tricky here, just start with something like.. ‘This study shows…’, or ‘Analysis of the data suggests that…’

The paper outlines the process of publishing research papers in journals and conference proceedings, aiming to provide early-stage researchers with a handy introduction to essential issues.
The fifth and final sentence addresses the ‘So What?’ question, and makes clear the claim to contribution.

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Propose a problem ...
The first sentence addresses the broad context. This locates the study in a policy, practice or research field.
Problem

The second sentence establishes a problem related to the broad context you have set out. It often starts with But, Yet or However…
Solution and approach

The third sentence says what specific research has been done. This sentence often starts with This research... or I report...
Results

The fourth sentence reports the results.

Don’t try to be too tricky here, just start with something like...

‘This study shows…’, or 'Analysis of the data suggests that…'
Contribution / So what?

The fifth and final sentence addresses the ‘So What?’ question, and makes clear the claim to contribution.
Review

Reflect on whether you understand the writing of abstracts in terms of:

- purpose
- content
- structure
Why do we use abstracts in academic and professional communication?

a. To briefly outline the purpose, content and outcome of your work

b. To concisely list reports or articles which are similar to your work

c. To explore in depth the methodology of your work
References


