

## How to write an abstract

The abstract should convey the essential meaning of the document.

- It will summarise the significance, potential contribution, and need for the work.
- It will state the hypothesis (If relevant) or the assumptions which you are going to be investigating.
- It will state the major objectives of the work to be done, outline the procedures and provide the reader with an understanding of the potential impact/value of the final work.

When presenting a literature review, think of the research/method as being a desk study.

Normally an abstract does not contain any cited references, although extended abstracts, which are frequently requested at conferences in the arts and humanities, might actually contain a few key references.

There will typically be a prescribed word limit on an abstract, find out what that is and make sure that your abstract does not exceed this limit.

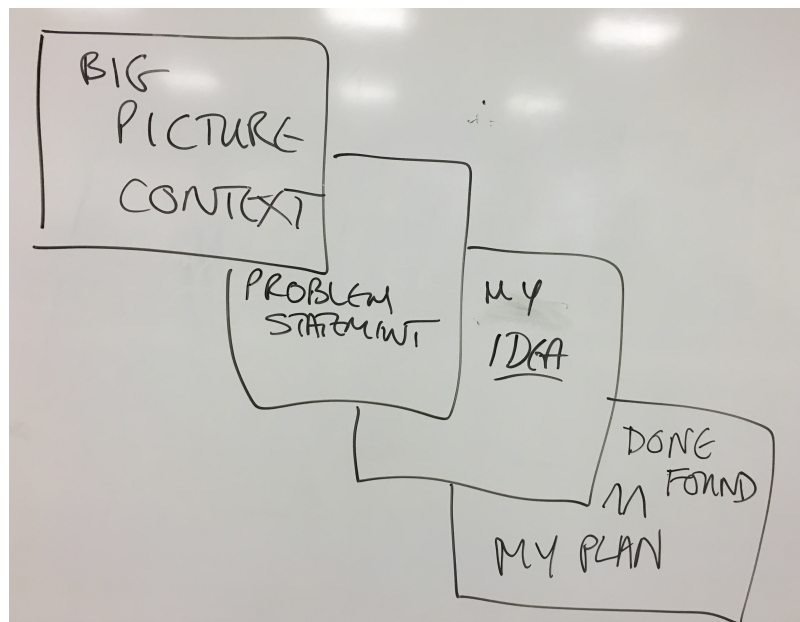
### Generic example:

This is the way the world is (a general context)

This is what is wrong with the world (the problem statement)

Here is my idea/proposed approach

This is what I have found and done, or the evidence which I think my approach will produce



Typically I suggest you write your abstract first to guide the structure of the document, and then revise it a second time towards the end when you have a clear idea of the content.

This is contrary to much common advice, however the discipline of trying to express an abstract before the work is complete can be helpful in clarifying the purpose of the writing. In this case you are writing an abstract for a 'work in progress'.

When you write the abstract at the start of the writing cycle, you are using the abstract writing exercise as a research tool, to clarify your thinking, evaluate your claims, and confirm that you have chosen the correct/realistic set of approaches and methodologies.

If you write an abstract before you have completed the task, you will probably have to conclude the abstract by stating what the project/data analysis will set out to find.

Here is a definition with some discussion from the perspective of Education

What goes in the ABSTRACT?

The abstract should convey to the reader concisely and accurately within the space of a few sentences, the claim to knowledge that the authors are making. It should indicate the boundaries of space and time within which the enquiry has occurred. If there is a claim to generality beyond the boundaries of the enquiry the basis of that claim should be given, for example that a random sample is thought to be representative of a larger population. There should also be a hint of the method of enquiry.

The boundaries of an enquiry are important - and are unfortunately too often omitted from abstracts. This is due to the regrettable tendency for researchers to generalise their results from, for example, a few schools to all schools, and to imply that what was true at a particular time, is true for all time. Some reference to the geographical location of the children, or teachers, or schools on whom the claim to knowledge rests should be made. Because of the international nature of the research community it is worth making clear in what country the research took place. Also the period in which the data was collected should be stated.

The abstract should be condensation of the substance of the paper, not a trailer, nor an introduction. Journals and thesis regulations usually put a limit of around 200 to 300 words to the length of an abstract. 'Trailer' is a term borrowed from the cinema industry to describe a showing of a few highlights in order to win an audience. An 'introduction' tells that something is coming, but doesn't reveal its substance. These are not what is needed.

Abstracts are recycled in abstract journals and electronic networks and provide the main vehicle for other researchers to become aware of particular studies. Hence the more clearly they convey the claim to knowledge of the original paper the more useful they are in helping the reader to decide whether it is worth taking the trouble to obtain and read the original and possibly cite it in his/her own writing.

Both the abstract and the paper should make sense without the other

Bassey, M. (1995) pages 70-71

## References

Bassey, M., 1995. Creating education through research: a global perspective of educational research for the 21st century, Kirklington Moor Press in conjunction with the British Educational Research Association. Available at: Hartley Library quarto 370.78 BAS

Johnson R., et al, [How to get a paper accepted at OOPSLA](#) Panel at OOPSLA'93, pp 429-436

Koopman P., 1997, How to write an abstract, <https://users.ece.cmu.edu/~koopman/essays/abstract.html>