

Writing an Abstract

An abstract is a summary that presents your work for a specific purpose.

Some tips:

- What's the purpose?
These different purposes result in very different abstracts:
 - Advertising (announcements, conference programs)
 - If just announcing a talk, etc., make it sound interesting!
 - Convincing (submitting to a conference or publisher)
 - Submitting to a conference, etc., means that you must convince your readers your research is worthwhile.
 - Proposing (submitting for a grant or in a class)
 - Submitting for a grant, etc., means that you must have some background in the field and a reasonable chance of success.
 - Describing (at the beginning of a published paper)
 - Explain what the reader will find. Tell them why to read it.
- Know your audience!
 - What is their background? Do they know the technical terms? Will your work be too hard to understand? Will it impress them?
(Abstracts might be rejected if they're confusing or if they appear too basic for a technical conference. Check on this before submitting.)
 - Do they speak the languages you're talking about? Explain more/less.
 - Are they an audience? Reading your article? Reviewers? (See above)
- Content:
 - What's the main point? Why do this research?
 - Include your conclusions if you have them.
 - What's the methodology?
 - Include some references. (But do they want a bibliography or not?)
 - Use of technical terms?
 - Examples, charts, etc.? (Sometimes you get an extra page for this.)
- Follow the instructions!
 - Do NOT go over the length. (But don't write too little either.)
 - Conference abstracts may be from 200 words to 2 pages.
 - Grant/funding proposals may be from 2 pages to 30+ pages.
- Have an appealing title. (This often isn't included in your word count.)
- Submission deadlines are often midnight, but don't start writing at 11pm. Get started early and ask at least your advisor for their opinion on your work. Writing an abstract isn't easy: you must be very clear in very few words!