How to Write an Abstract

What is an abstract?
An abstract is a short preview of your report, generally 150-250 words, intended to inform potential readers about your topic, research, and findings. It usually comes at the beginning of a paper and allows people to get a brief glimpse into the content of your research before reading your report in its entirety.

Abstracts are also commonly used as presentation proposals for academic conferences. The abstract gives conference organizers an idea of what you’d like to present. At times, the abstract is publicized in the conference program, so that attendees can decide whether to attend your session or someone else’s. For these reasons, it’s important that an abstract is a clearly written, focused overview of your report or presentation.

What to include in an abstract:
- A title that clearly indicates the focus of you report, presentation, or essay
- The research or data that you have incorporated into the report
- The methodology you used to collect data (if you are writing a scientific report) or the logical structure or theoretical framework from which you are writing your argument (if you are writing an essay in the humanities)
- Your findings, if you are writing a scientific report; your argument, if you are writing an essay in the humanities
- If you have space, a hint to the implications of your findings or the general importance of your argument

A good exercise for writing an abstract is to continually answer the question “What is my report/paper/presentation about?” or, more accurately, “What does my report/paper/presentation do?”

What NOT to include in an abstract:
- Too much detail. An abstract should give an overview of the report or presentation, with special attention to the data/research you use and the conclusions you draw

For additional information and examples of abstracts in the sciences and humanities, please see:
http://urc.ucdavis.edu/howtowriteanabstract.html
WHAT IS AN ABSTRACT?

An abstract is a short, clear, and searchable summary of a larger piece of writing.

Have you ever searched for an article through the library website and come across something like this? Many scientific articles include abstracts at the beginning.

WHAT SHOULD AN ABSTRACT INCLUDE?

KEY WORDS & PHRASES: an abstract helps a reader know what your paper is about RIGHT AWAY! Key words and phrases help orient the reader.

TOPIC/PROBLEM under investigation, the THESIS, and RESEARCH or DATA used: This information will help your reader know the difference between your paper and another paper on a similar topic.

An abstract should be ACCURATE, SELF-CONTAINED, CONCISE & SPECIFIC, NON-EVALUATIVE, and COHERENT & READABLE.


If you’re ever unsure about whether your abstract...

- has enough/helpful keywords
- identifies your problem, thesis, research, & data
- is accurate, self-contained, concise & specific, non-evaluative, and coherent & readable

feel free to come talk to a writing consultant!