Writing Report Abstracts

Summary:

This handout discusses how to write good abstracts for reports.

It covers **informational and descriptive abstracts** and gives pointers for success.

Types of abstracts

There are two types of abstracts: informational and descriptive.

Informational abstracts

- Communicate contents of reports
- Include purpose, methods, scope, results, conclusions, and recommendations
- Highlight essential points
- Are short—from a paragraph to a page or two, depending upon the length of the report (10% or less of the report)
- Allow readers to decide whether they want to read the report

Descriptive abstracts

- Tell what the report contains
- Include purpose, methods, scope, but NOT results, conclusions, and recommendations
- Are always very short— usually under 100 words
- Introduce subject to readers, who must then read the report to learn study results

Qualities of a good abstract

An effective abstract

- Uses one or more well-developed paragraphs, which are unified, coherent, concise, and able to stand alone
- Uses an introduction-body-conclusion structure in which the parts of the report are discussed in order: purpose, findings, conclusions, recommendations
- Follows strictly the chronology of the report
- Provides logical connections between material included
- Adds no new information but simply summarizes the report
- Is intelligible to a wide audience

Steps for writing effective report abstracts

To write an effective report abstract, follow these four steps.

1. Reread your report with the purpose of abstracting in mind. Look specifically for these main parts: purpose, methods, scope, results, conclusions, and recommendations.
2. After you have finished rereading your report, write a rough draft without looking back at your report. Consider the main parts of the

abstract listed in step #1. Do not merely copy key sentences from your report. You will put in too much or too little information. Do not summarize information in a new way.
3. Revise your rough draft to
- Correct weaknesses in organization and coherence,
- Drop superfluous information,
- Add important information originally left out,
- Eliminate wordiness, and
- Correct errors in grammar and mechanics.
4. Carefully proofread your final copy

Adapted from <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/656/1/>