



Abstracts

A-State Online Writing Center

What is an abstract?

An abstract is a condensed, self-contained overview of an essay or report that is typically about 200 to 250 words depending on the field of study and abstract type. These short introductions do not provide insight or analysis; they summarize the content, research methods, and conclusion reached in an essay or report from a third-person point of view. Additionally, they do not address outside information or present new information.

What is its purpose?

Because abstracts provide a brief overview, readers can then judge whether they wish to continue reading the larger body of work and/or if the work helps their research. Abstracts can precede introductions to journal articles, theses, grant applications, book proposals, and more. They are also used for indexing purposes, which is why keywords at the bottom of the abstract are important. Moreover, these specific associated keywords allow researchers to find that body of work within online databases more easily.

Types of abstracts

There are four types of abstracts: informative, descriptive, critical, and highlight abstracts. However, students most often use informative abstracts. With that being said, always follow the guidelines dictated by your instructor or institution.

Informative Abstracts

Informative abstracts detail the background, major points, research methods, significant findings, the conclusion reached, and any recommendations so that readers understand the main elements of the paper before delving further. These paragraphs are typically 250 words in length, although this can vary based on discipline.

Outline of an Informative Abstract

Although different disciplines may require distinct information, informative abstracts follow this outline:

1. Background & purpose of paper or report (i.e., Why was this topic researched? Why should people care?)
2. Main argument or thesis points
3. Research methods or approaches used

4. Significant findings and/or results found and how they may contribute to the overall discussion surrounding the topic at hand

Descriptive Abstracts

Descriptive abstracts provide an overview of the content, detailing major points and research methods involved. However, contrary to informative abstracts, they do not provide significant findings, conclusions, or recommendations. Additionally, they are about 100 words in length. For these reasons, they are often less helpful in determining the relevance of a work when conducting research as opposed to informative abstracts.

Critical Abstracts

Unlike the previous two, critical abstracts evaluate and/or offer analysis on the paper's findings and provide an overview of the paper. These abstracts are typically longer, extending to about 400 to 500 words because of analytical commentary. Further, they can refer to outside information to compare and contrast, which informative and descriptive abstracts do not include.

Highlight Abstracts

Highlight abstracts are infrequently used in academia because they are meant to grasp the reader's attention to read the work more so than act as stand-alone overviews. Readers may not receive a full picture of the purpose and major findings of a text.

Informative Abstract Sample

Kamat, Prashant V. (2007, February, 1). Meeting the clean energy demand: Nanostructure architectures for solar energy conversion. *The Journal of Physical Chemistry*, 111(7), 2834-2860. <https://doi.org/10.1021/jp066952u>

The increasing energy demand in the near future will force us to seek environmentally clean alternative energy resources. The emergence of nanomaterials as the new building blocks to construct light energy harvesting assemblies has opened up new ways to utilize renewable energy sources. This article discusses three major ways to utilize nanostructures for the design of solar energy conversion devices: (i) Mimicking photosynthesis with donor-acceptor molecular assemblies or clusters, (ii) semiconductor assisted photocatalysis to produce fuels such as hydrogen, and (iii) nanostructure semiconductor based solar cells. This account further highlights some of the recent developments in these areas and points out the factors that limit the efficiency optimization. Strategies to employ ordered assemblies of semiconductor and metal nanoparticles, inorganic-organic hybrid assemblies, and carbon nanostructures in the energy conversion schemes are also discussed. Directing the future research efforts toward utilization of such tailored nanostructures or ordered hybrid assemblies will play an important task in achieving the desired goal of cheap and efficient fuel production (e.g., solar hydrogen production) or electricity (photochemical solar cells).

Tips

- Include keywords and technical terms from the document; this makes the abstract/paper searchable

- Do not be vague or general; discuss specifics
- Be concise
- Use active voice over passive
- Do not use first-person “I” statements
- Do not refer to any outside body of work
- Do not present new information that is not found within the paper
- Do not use acronyms or jargon

APA Formatting Guidelines

<https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids/abstract-keywords-guide.pdf>

Works Consulted

- <https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/writing-an-abstract>
- <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/abstracts/>
- <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/types-of-writing/abstract/>
- <https://writing.colostate.edu/guides/page.cfm?pageid=1252&guideid=59>
- <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/abstract>

More Resources & Examples

- <https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/writing-an-abstract-for-your-research-paper/>
- <https://urca.msu.edu/abstract-samples>
- <https://style.mla.org/how-to-write-an-abstract/>
- <https://www.scientific-editing.info/writing-an-abstract-in-mla-format/>
- <https://cmeforum.wordpress.com/2012/01/04/how-to-write-informative-abstracts/>