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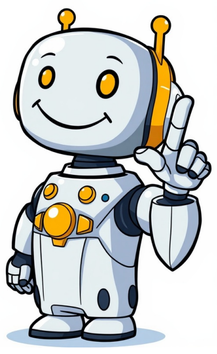

Scholars often write abstracts for various applications: conference presentations may require an abstract or other short summary for a program; journal articles almost always require abstracts; invited talks and lectures are often advertised using an abstract. While the application may necessarily change the length of the abstract (a conference program may only allow for 50-75 words, for instance), the purpose and structure remains fairly constant.Abstracts are generally kept brief (approximately 150-200 words). They differ by field, but in general, they need to summarize the article so that readers can decide if it is relevant to their work. The typical abstract includes these elements:A statement of the problem and objectivesA statement of the significance of the workA summary of employed methods or your research approachA summary of findings or conclusions of the studyA description of the implications of the findingsRegardless of field, abstract authors should explain the purpose of the work, methods used, the results and the conclusions that can be drawn. However, each field purports slightly different ways to structure the abstract. A reliable strategy is to write the abstract as a condensed version of your article, with 1-2 sentences summarizing each major section. This means that in many of the sciences and a large portion of the humanities, abstracts follow a version of the IMRAD structure: Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion.Most scientific journals require authors to submit such abstracts. It is generally advisable to write the abstract in the English language. That is because most papers in other languages, especially Asian nations, tend to publish an English abstract with common search engines, such as, the MLA site.Example AbstractThis example abstract follows the IMRAD structure closely. The first two sentences are the introduction and background information. Sentences 3-5 describe the methods used in the study. Sentence 6 summarizes the results, while the last two sentences summarize the discussion and conclusion of the study; they also indicate the significance of the results.Usability and User-Centered Theory for 21st Century OWLs by Dana Lynn Driscoll, H. Allen Brizee, Michael Salvo, and Morgan Sousa from The Handbook of Research on Virtual Workplaces and the New Nature of Business Practices. Eds. Kirk St. Amant and Pavel Zemlansky. Hershey, PA: Idea Group Publishing, 2008.This article describes results of usability research conducted on the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL). The Purdue OWL is an information-rich educational website that provides free writing resources to users worldwide. Researchers conducted two generations of usability tests. In the first test, participants were asked to navigate the OWL and answer questions. Results of the first test and user-centered scholarship indicated that a more user-centered focus would improve usability. The second test asked participants to answer writing-related questions using both the OWL website and a user-centered OWL prototype. Participants took significantly less time to find information using the prototype and reported a more positive response to the user-centered prototype than the original OWL. Researchers conclude that a user-centered website is more effective and can be a model for information-rich online resources. Researchers also conclude that usability research can be a productive source of ideas, underscoring the need for participatory invention. adjective (5)noun (4)verb (used with object) (5)View synonyms for abstractthought of apart from concrete realities, specific objects, or actual instances.expressing a quality or characteristic apart from any specific object or instance, as justice, poverty, and speed.not applied or practical; theoretical.difficult to understand; abstruse.Fine Arts.of or relating to the formal aspect of art, emphasizing lines, colors, generalized or geometrical forms, etc., especially with reference to their relationship to one another.Often Abstract pertaining to the nonrepresentational art styles of the 20th century.a summary of a text, scientific article, document, speech, etc.; epitome.something that concentrates in itself the essential qualities of anything more extensive or more general, or of several things; essence.an idea or term considered apart from some material basis or object.an abstract work of art.to make an abstract of; summarize.to draw or take away; remove.to divert or draw away the attention of.to steal.to consider as a general quality or characteristic apart from specific objects or instances.to abstract the notions of time, space, and matter.having no reference to material objects or specific examples; not concretenot applied or practical; theoreticalhard to understand; recondite; abstrusedenoting art characterized by geometric, formalized, or otherwise nonrepresentational qualitiesdefined in terms of its formal propertiesphilosophy (of an idea) functioning for some empiricists as the meaning of a general termthe word ``man'' does not name all men but the abstract idea of manhoodCollins English Dictionary Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012a condensed version of a piece of writing, speech, etc; summaryan abstract term or ideaan abstract painting, sculpture, etcwithout reference to specific circumstances or practical experienceCollins English Dictionary Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012to think of (a quality or concept) generally without reference to a specific example; regard theoreticallyto form (a general idea) by abstraction(also intr) to summarize or epitomizeto remove or extracteuphemistic, to stealCollins English Dictionary Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012abstracter nounabstractly adverbabstractness nounnonabstract adjectivenonabstractly adverbnonabstractness nounoverabstract verb (used with object)preabstract adjectivesuperabstract adjectivesuperabstractly adverbsuperabstractness nounOrigin of abstract1First recorded in 140050; late Middle English: withdrawn from worldly interests, from Latin abstractus drawn off (past participle of abstrahere). See abs-, tract 1Origin of abstract1C14: (in the sense: extracted): from Latin abstractus drawn off, removed from (something specific), from abs- ab- 1 + trahere to drawIdiomsabstract away from, to omit from consideration.in the abstract, without reference to a specific object or instance; in theory.beauty in the abstract.Examples are provided to illustrate real-world usage of words in context. Any opinions expressed do not reflect the views of Dictionary.com.The subject matter of the play exists before the story and it is always something abstract, Stoppard told the Paris Review in 1988.Read more on The Wall Street JournalHe adapted their simple massing and abstract play of volumes, graced them with a few flourishes of Colonial detail, and served them up to young clients on Long Island and in coastal Massachusetts.Read more on The Wall Street JournalA large, gestural 1972 painting attested to a road not taken, while records of his sojourns in Europe and Africa revealed the influence of architecture on abstract structure.Read more on The Wall Street JournalAs good as Teller is as a husband in crisis, the Oscar-winning Randolph is her own commanding source of light, enough to sell this movies feel-good abstracts and wry commentaries on her own.Read more on Los Angeles TimesA sense of charismatic presence the material manifestation of an abstract idea is inescapable.Read more on Los Angeles TimesabstrusehypotheticalphilosophicalunrealDefinitions and idiom definitions from Dictionary.com Unabridged, based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, Random House, Inc. 2023Idioms from The American Heritage Idioms Dictionary copyright 2002, 2001, 1995 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.abstr.abstract algebraBrowse#aabbccddeeffgghhiijjkkllmmnnooppqqrrssttuuvvwwxxyyzzAboutCareersContact usCookies, terms, & privacyHelpFollow usGet the Word of the Day every day! 2025 Dictionary.com, LLC Etymology Adjective Middle English, "withdrawn, removed, abstruse, extracted from a longer work, (of nouns in grammar) not concrete," borrowed from Medieval Latin abstractus "removed, secluded, incorporeal, universal, extracted from a larger work, summarized," going back to Latin, past participle of abstrahere "to remove forcibly, turn aside, divert," from abs- (variant of ab- ab- before c- and t-) + trahere "to drag, draw, take along," of uncertain origin Note: The etymology of trahere beyond Latin is problematic. It would require a verbal base *tregh-, a shape that is not allowable by Indo-European root structure constraints (voiceless stops cannot co-occur with voiced aspirated stops, though there may be exceptions if a sonorant is interposed). However, aside from loans and expressive formations, Latin words do not begin with dr-, so it is conceivable that initial dr- in an inherited root could have shifted to tr-. The verb trahere then invites comparison with Germanic *dragan- "to draw, pull" (see draw entry 1), virtually identical in meaning, though this presupposes a further change, since *dragan- must descend from Indo-European *dhrogh-. Thus *dhragheti > *dragheti (by dissimulation of the first aspirate) > trahit (3rd person singular present tense). (See M. Weiss, Outline of the Historical and Comparative Grammar of Latin, 2nd edition [Ann Arbor, 2020], pp. 169, 176.) Alternatively, trahere has been compared with Old Irish tethraig "ebbed, receded," with nominal correspondents trig "beach, shore," Middle Welsh trei "ebb, draining," all presupposing a root *treHgh- or *tragh-. (See S. Schumacher, Die keltischen Primrverben [Innsbruck, 2004], pp. 635-36; his hypothesis is seconded by M. de Vaan, Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages [Leiden, 2008].) M. Weis, on the other hand, would assign this etymon to *tregh- "run" (whence Old English rgan "to run," Gothic biragjan)see "Limited Latin Grassmann's Law: Do We Need It?," Vina Diem Celebrent: Studies in Linguistics and Philology in Honor of Brent Vine (Ann Arbor, 2018), pp. 438-47. See further P. Schrijver, The Reflexes of the Proto-Indo-European Laryngeals in Latin (Amsterdam, 1991), pp. 188-89, where an attempt is made to explain the a of trahere by the assumption of a laryngeal in the root. Noun Middle English, derivative of abstract abstract entry 1 (or borrowed directly from Medieval Latin abstractus) Verb Middle English abstracten "to draw away, remove," derivative of abstract abstract entry 1 (or borrowed directly from Latin abstractus) First Known Use Adjective14th century, in the meaning defined at sense 2 Noun15th century, in the meaning defined at sense 1 Verb15th century, in the meaning defined at transitive sense 4 Time Traveler The first known use of abstract was in the 14th century See more words from the same century In this section, you will find many instructional materials weve developed for our Writing Center teaching.However, there are limitations to these materials. Assignments vary, and different instructors want different things from student writers. Therefore, the advice here may or may not apply to your writing situation.Finally, handouts can give only a fraction of the customized guidance that an individual conference with a Writing Center instructor can provide. If you have questions about the information in our handouts, please make an appointment to see a Writing Center instructor. This is an accordion element with a series of buttons that open and close related content panels. An abstract is a short summary of your (published or unpublished) research paper, usually about a paragraph (c. 6-7 sentences, 150-250 words) long. A well-written abstract serves multiple purposes:an abstract lets readers get the gist or essence of your paper or article quickly, in order to decide whether to read the full paper;an abstract prepares readers to follow the detailed information, analyses, and arguments in your full paper;and, later, an abstract helps readers remember key points from your paper.Its also worth remembering that search engines and bibliographic databases use abstracts, as well as the title, to identify key terms for indexing your published paper. So what you include in your abstract and in your title are crucial for helping other researchers find your paper or article.If you are writing an abstract for a course paper, your professor may give you specific guidelines for what to include and how to organize your abstract. Similarly, academic journals often have specific requirements for abstracts. So in addition to following the advice on this page, you should be sure to look for and follow any guidelines from the course or journal youre writing for. Abstracts contain most of the following kinds of information in brief form. The body of your paper will, of course, develop and explain these ideas much more fully. As you will see in the samples below, the proportion of your abstract that you devote to each kind of informationand the sequence of that informationwill vary, depending on the nature and genre of the paper that you are summarizing in your abstract. And in some cases, some of this information is implied, rather than stated explicitly. The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, which is widely used in the social sciences, gives specific guidelines for what to include in the abstract for different kinds of papersfor empirical studies, literature reviews or meta-analyses, theoretical papers, methodological papers, and case studies.Here are the typical kinds of information found in most abstracts:the context or background information for your research; the general topic under study; the specific topic of your researchthe central questions or statement of the problem your research addresseswhats already known about this question, what previous research has done or shownthe main reason(s), the exigency, the rationale, the goals for your researchWhy is it important to address these questions? Are you, for example, examining a new topic? Why is that topic worth examining? Are you filling a gap in previous research? Applying new methods to take a fresh look at existing ideas or data? Resolving a dispute within the literature in your field? . . .your research and/or analytical methodsyour main findings, results, or argumentsthe significance or implications of your findings or arguments.Your abstract should be intelligible on its own, without a readers having to read your entire paper. And in an abstract, you usually do not cite referencesmost of your abstract will describe what you have studied in your research and what you have found and what you argue in your paper. In the body of your paper, you will cite the specific literature that informs your research. Although you might be tempted to write your abstract first because it will appear as the very first part of your paper, its a good idea to wait to write your abstract until after youve drafted your full paper, so that you know what youre summarizing.What follows are some sample abstracts in published papers or articles, all written by faculty at UW-Madison who come from a variety of disciplines. We have annotated these samples to help you see the work that these authors are doing within their abstracts. The social science sample (Sample 1) below uses the present tense to describe general facts and interpretations that have been and are currently true, including the prevailing explanation for the social phenomenon under study. That abstract also uses the present tense to describe the methods, the findings, the arguments, and the implications of the findings from their new research study. The authors use the past tense to describe previous research.The humanities sample (Sample 2) below uses the past tense to describe completed events in the past (the texts created in the pulp fiction industry in the 1970s and 80s) and uses the present tense to describe what is happening in those texts, to explain the significance or meaning of those texts, and to describe the arguments presented in the article.The science samples (Samples 3 and 4) below use the past tense to describe what previous research studies have done and the research the authors have conducted, the methods they have followed, and what they have found. In their rationale or justification for their research (what remains to be done), they use the present tense. They also use the present tense to introduce their study (in Sample 3, Here we report . . .) and to explain the significance of their study (In Sample 3, This reprogramming . . . provides a scalable cell source for. . .). Reporting new findings about the reasons for increasing economic homogamy among spousesGonalons-Pons, Pilar, and Christine R. Schwartz. Trends in Economic Homogamy: Changes in Assortative Mating or the Division of Labor in Marriage? Demography, vol. 54, no. 3, 2017, pp. 985-1005. Analyzing underground pulp fiction publications in Tanzania, this article makes an argument about the cultural significance of those publicationsEmily Callaci. Street Textuality: Socialism, Masculinity, and Urban Belonging in Tanzanias Pulp Fiction Publishing Industry, 1975-1985. Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 59, no. 1, 2017, pp. 183-210. Reporting a new method for reprogramming adult mouse fibroblasts into induced cardiac progenitor cellsLalit, Pratik A., Max R. Salick, Daryl O. Nelson, Jayne M. Squirrell, Christina M. Shafer, Neel G. Patel, Imaan Saeed, Eric G. Schmuck, Yogananda S. Markandeya, Rachel Wong, Martin R. Lea, Kevin W. Eliceiri, Timothy A. Hacker, Wendy C. Crone, Michael Kyba, Daniel J. Garry, Ron Stewart, James A. Thomson, Karen M. Downs, Gary E. Lyons, and Timothy J. Kamp. Lineage Reprogramming of Fibroblasts into Proliferative Induced Cardiac Progenitor Cells by Defined Factors. Cell Stem Cell, vol. 18, 2016, pp. 354-367.Note: This journal calls this paragraph at the beginning of the article a Summary, rather than an Abstract. This journal provides multiple ways for readers to grasp the content of this research article quickly. In addition to this paragraph-length prose summary, this article also has an effective graphical abstract, a bulleted list of highlights list at the beginning of the article, and a two-sentence In Brief summary. Reporting results about the effectiveness of antibiotic therapy in managing acute bacterial sinusitis, from a rigorously controlled studyNote: This journal requires authors to organize their abstract into four specific sections, with strict word limits. Because the headings for this structured abstract are self-explanatory, we have chosen not to add annotations to this sample abstract.Wald, Ellen R., David Nash, and Jens Eickhoff. Effectiveness of Amoxicillin/Clavulanate Potassium in the Treatment of Acute Bacterial Sinusitis in Children. Pediatrics, vol. 124, no. 1, 2009, pp. 9-15.AbstractOBJECTIVE: The role of antibiotic therapy in managing acute bacterial sinusitis (ABS) in children is controversial. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of high-dose amoxicillin/potassium clavulanate in the treatment of children diagnosed with ABS.METHODS: This was a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study. Children 1 to 10 years of age with a clinical presentation compatible with ABS were eligible for participation. Patients were stratified according to age (

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