

Scientific Writing Course
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Abstract

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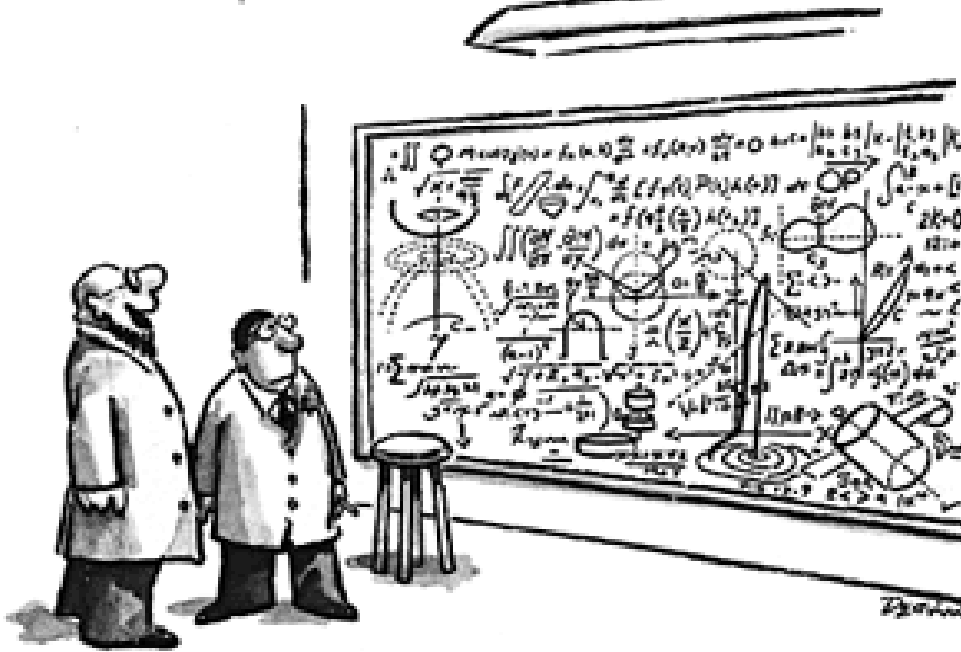
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Abstract

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Provides an overview of the paper that makes sense when read alone and when read with the paper.



"Hey, no problem!"

Abstract

Includes highlights from each section of the paper...

- Background
- Question asked
- Experiments done
- Results found
- Answer
- Implication, Speculation, etc

General considerations for abstracts

- Leave until last
 - Should fall into place if all other sections are done
 - Things change along the way
- Abstracts for manuscripts are simpler than abstracts for conferences
- Abstracts appear in Medline
 - Make them very easy to read
 - Numbers and statistics for key findings

General considerations for abstracts

- Check format for journal
- Word count
 - 500, 250, sometimes as short as 100
- Unstructured
- Structured

Unstructured abstracts

- No background or 1 sentence only
- 1 sentence Methods (study design, study population)
- 2-3 sentence Results (primary hypothesis, main findings, avoid “Mea Culpa” unless very big)
- 1-2 sentence Discussion (main outcome [“Mission Accomplished”, possibly implication])

Example of an unstructured abstract

“We conducted a quantitative and qualitative study of alcohol use and high-risk sexual behavior among adolescents and young adults of age 15-21 years in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Methods included a cross-sectional survey of youth sampled at nightclubs and bottle stores informed by participant observation, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions.

Findings corroborated a cycle of HIV transmission that involves older men, younger women, and ultimately the steady partners of both.

Nightclubs and other drinking establishments catering to youth can provide opportunities for preventing HIV transmission through structural interventions or targeted outreach education.”

Word count: 94

Structured abstracts

- Follow journal format
- Basic:
 - Objective: not complete sentence
 - Methods
 - Results
 - Conclusion
- Alternative: Conform to journal examples
 - Background * Design * Setting * Participants *
*Intervention * Main Outcome Measure *
Conclusion/implication
- RCT format (see CONSORT guidelines)

Writing tips for Abstracts: Condensing

- **A typical problem is too many words.**
- **Example condenses result & method into one sentence**

We found that ectopic expression of *nkx2.5* in *C. elegans* body wall muscle directly **activated expression of both of the endogenous *myo-2* gene....**

Writing tips for Abstracts: Signal Topics

Very useful for unstructured abstracts

Topic

Signal

Question +
Experiment

To determine whether..., we

To test the hypothesis
that..., we

We asked whether...to answer
this question, we...

Writing tips for Abstracts : Signal Topics

Topic

Signal

Results
Answer

We found...
We conclude that...
Therefore...

Implication

These results suggest
that...

Writing tips for Abstracts

- State the question clearly... not "*Plasma cholesterol metabolism was studied*" (which is not your question, it's what you did!)
- Use same key terms, verb, and point of view for question and answer
- Use same verb tense as in paper
- Keep sentences short
- Use simple words; avoid jargon
- Avoid abbreviations (1-3 max)
- Define any abbreviation the first time you use it
- Keep to the Journal's word limit

Key Words

- Follow abstract
- Select the 3 to 5 that will land your paper into the hands of the right audience
- Standard words in MeSH headings

Key Words

- MeSH Headings:
 - Instructions to Authors vary for different journals; consult specific journal before selecting keywords.
 - Use the MeSH Browser, an online Web application:
 - Start with specific words or short expressions. Consider using two or three terms to best describe the essential subject(s) of your article
 - avoid entering a sentence or article title as the results may not be of use.
 - search PubMed to find articles on similar topics, and review the MeSH headings assigned to those articles.

Today's homework

- **Draft (revise):**
 - Discussion section
 - Abstract
 - Revise other parts of your manuscript