



Guidelines for Writing an APA Style Abstract

A good abstract is a difficult beast to write: it needs to be brief yet comprehensive. Library and Archives Canada requires that abstracts be no longer than 150 words; confirm your university program's word limit, which may be as few as 120 words. We have compiled these guidelines to help students who do not have a copy of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th edition). If you have an APA style manual, this information is covered in section 2.04.

What to Include

For a thesis paper (report of an empirical study), APA suggests including the following areas:

- The problem under investigation. This may be your first sentence, and it could be your research question.
- Participants, including number, type, age, and sex.
- Experimental method, including data-gathering procedures.
- Findings.
- Conclusions, implications, and applications.

Writing Style

The purpose of the abstract is to summarize the contents of the paper comprehensively yet briefly. It is not meant to be an introduction, so do not waste words giving background or introductory information. It's virtually impossible to write a good abstract before completing your paper, because you must include findings and conclusions. Our advice? Write it *last!*

A good abstract is accurate and specific, self-contained, nonevaluative, and readable:

- **Accurate and specific:** Every word counts! Omit information that is not covered in the paper itself. It is helpful to compare the abstract with an outline of the paper's headings.
- **Self-contained:** Define all abbreviations or acronyms that you use. Paraphrase rather than quote.
- **Nonevaluative:** Report, rather than comment on, what is in the body of the paper.
- **Readable:** Write clearly and in the active voice. Use present tense to describe results and past tense to describe methods. Consider including the search words that potential readers will use in electronic searches.

Formatting

The abstract starts on a new page, following the title page; the page should have a running head and a page number. Label the page with *Abstract* centered and italicized. Double space and type the abstract as a single block paragraph. There should be no first line indent or other indentation.

Talk to us if you have any other questions about writing abstracts. We're always happy to help!