




Graduate Research Advanced Skills Program (GRASP)

Research Writing Series

6/7

How to write an abstract

Dr Petra Dumbell, Sem 1 2022



I acknowledge the Whadjuk Nyungar as the Custodians of the land on which I live and work. This Country was never ceded, it always was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

I pay my respects to Whadjuk Nyungar Elders past and present. I value their ancestral and continuing caring for Country practices and thank them for looking after this Country for so long.

I appreciate Indigenous ways of communication which are inclusive and respectful, and I recognise that this Country has been a place of teaching, research and learning for tens of thousands of years.

Why write a (good) abstract?

- As summary of your thesis
- To submit a paper to a journal/conference

The abstract serves as an advertisement for the article, ..., the abstract can influence the reviewer to develop a favourable bias toward the manuscript. (LaPlaca et.al. 2018, p.203)

A decorative vertical bar on the left side of the slide, featuring a series of concentric, wavy green lines that create a sense of depth and movement.

The abstract is like a door



“Pink door” by gorgeous,
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/gorgeous/2981814372>



“Door to nowhere” by jamelah e.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/jamelah/167863900>

Scholarly voice in your abstract

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>I found that $x = y$.</i> | First person singular – active voice |
| 2. <i>We found that $x = y$.</i> | First person plural – active voice |
| 3. <i>It was found that $x = y$.</i> | Passive voice |
| 4. <i>The authors found that $x = y$.</i> | Third person plural – active voice |

(Wallwork, 2016, p.223)

Tense in your abstract

1. Present Simple

We show, we investigate...

X appears to have a strong positive correlation with Y, despite....

2. Past Simple

The authors examined...and found that...

3. Present Perfect

These phenomena have been studied for decades.

4. Past Perfect Continuous

Such results have been appearing in the literature since 1978

Wallwork (2016, p.225)

Types of abstracts

Descriptive abstract

- Often very short - no more than 100 words.
- Does not provide results or conclusions
- More outline than summary
- Social sciences and humanities

Informative Abstract

- Concise summary of the article - 200-500 words.
- Background, purpose, methods, results, findings and conclusion
- Science, health sciences

Structured Abstract

- Clearly labelled headings and sections, different lengths.

Descriptive abstract

“Advanced literacy and the place of literary semantics in secondary education: A tool of fictional analysis”

This article presents a tool of fictional analysis for secondary education that aims at providing standards of interpretation and allaying fears of standard imposition. The semantic core of the tool adapts the deontic, alethic, and axiomatic modalities used in Dolezel (1998). Four "extensions" are added to this core -- "cultural," "visual," "(meta)cognitive," and "epistemic" -- which above all mediate between student experience and pure abstraction, and invite students to think with and about tools and texts rather than blindly apply models. The relationship of the tool with literary theory and the appropriate age for learning such a tool are also discussed.

Candel, Daniel. *Semiotica* Vol. 195, Iss. 1-4, (0, 2013): 305-329.

Informative Abstract

“Can we use crop modelling for identifying climate change adaptation options?”

Climate model projections coupled with process-based crop models are advocated for assessing impacts of climate change on crop yields and for informing crop-level adaptations. However, most reported studies are vague on the choice of the global circulation models (GCMs) for climate projections, and on the corresponding uncertainty with this type of model simulations. Here we investigated whether climate-crop modelling can be used for identifying crop management-level adaptation options. We focused our analyses on a case study for maize in southern Africa using the APSIM crop growth model and projections from 17 individual climate models for the period 2017–2060 for the contrasting representative concentration pathways 2.6 and 8.5. Intensification of nitrogen fertiliser use (from 30 to 90 kg N ha⁻¹) was simulated as an example of a crop management-level adaptation to climate change. Uncertainties in crop yield predictions were about 30 to 60%, i.e. larger than expected crop responses to most management-level interventions or adaptations. Variation in simulated yields was caused by inter-seasonal rainfall variability and uncertainty with climate models. Some GCMs resulted in significantly different maize yield predictions, without any clear pattern across sites. Given these high uncertainties, we argue that crop modellers should be cautious when informing future crop management adaptation strategies based on climate-crop model ensembles. A better use of crop models is the simulation of crop responses to current weather variability aiming at the identification of crop management practices for coping with climate variability. Promising practices can then be evaluated with farmers on their feasibility over a range of plausible future biophysical and socio-economic farming conditions..

MarcCorbeels, DavidBerre, Leonard Rusinamhodzi, Santiago Lopez-Ridaurac: Agricultural and Forest Meteorology
Volumes 256–257, 15 June 2018, Pages 46-52

Structured abstract

PURPOSE: To summarize the main findings from research on structured abstracts.

METHODS: A narrative review of all the relevant papers known to the author was conducted.

RESULTS: Authors and readers judged the structured abstracts to be more useful than traditional ones. In 1987 the Ad Hoc Working Group for Critical Appraisal of the Medical Literature proposed guidelines for informative seven-headings abstracts. In 1990 Haynes et al. reconsidered the structured abstract of clinical research and review articles and proposed revised guidelines. Nowadays, most abstracts are informative, and the most commonly used structure is IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results And Discussion) format.

CONCLUSIONS: There are many variations in the structured-abstract formats prescribed by different journals. But even in recent years, not all abstracts of original articles are structured. More research is needed on a number of questions related to the quality and utility of structured abstracts.

Key words: Abstracting and indexing. Review literature. Peer review

Guimaraes, C. A. 2006: Structured Abstracts: Narrative Review Acta Cir. Bras. vol.21 no.4 São Paulo July/Aug

Writing abstracts (1)

- ✓ Read instructions of journal/publisher/supervisor
- ✓ Refer to example abstracts
- ✓ Read your paper/thesis

- ✓ Reduce each section into 1-2 sentences
- ✓ Make sure you have not missed anything important
- ✓ Slightly expand on each point in draft abstract

Writing abstracts (2)

- ✓ Read instructions of journal/publisher/supervisor
- ✓ Refer to example abstracts
- ✓ Read your paper/thesis
- ✓ Answer following questions:
 - What is this about? - introduction
 - Why did you do it? - relevance (no background, no references)
 - How did you do it? - methods, methodology
 - What did you find? - findings, results
 - What does it mean? - *so what?*, conclusion

Editing abstracts

- ✓ Check voice: who is your audience?
- ✓ Be as concise as possible.

Each word needs to fight to stay in!

- ✓ Be as clear as possible.

Watch out for sentence structure, grammar etc

- ✓ Make sure words used match title/keywords.
- ✓ Make sure there is no new information.
- ✓ Check that abstract makes sense on its own.
- ✓ Polish...
- ✓ ...and then polish again

Questions

GRASP webpage

<https://libguides.library.curtin.edu.au/grasp>

Help

libraryhelp@curtin.edu.au

Feedback (Stop – Start – Continue)

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1t7roPInys2xK_0zY69ivY9s09ZNs2iY_byLVdCSKD7M/edit?usp=sharing

2 Minute Introduction

References

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