

#40) Writing an Abstract of a Research Project

Adapted from “Writing an Abstract” by Lockheed Engineering and Sciences Company Environmental Programs Office.

So, what exactly IS an abstract?

Your abstract will be a short (100 to 250 words) *summary* of your work. It should be *self-contained* and *succinct*. Many publications and search services present the abstract of a work to the reader first; therefore, your abstract needs to get the message across quickly.

What should my abstract include?

- You’ll want to tell readers exactly what your *research question or focus* was. What is it you were investigating?
- How did you investigate? If you did scientific research, tell us about *methodology* and *technique*.
- Next, you’ll want to tell readers about the *results* of this research.
- Finally, relate your *conclusions* and the *significance* of this investigation. Do you have *recommendations* for further study?

Okay, so how do I actually write it?

According to Lockheed Engineering and Sciences Company’s Publication Department, **the best time to write your abstract is after you’ve done your outline, but before you’ve written a draft** of your paper or presentation. Completing the abstract first is not only less exhausting, but it also helps clarify what the significant aspects of your work are before you start writing. Your abstract can help guide the writing process. You can then go back and make any changes that are necessary in your abstract when you are finished with your paper.

Are there any tips that can help me write a great abstract?

- Use active voice verbs. They’re more concise and more, well, *active* than passive verbs. (See St. Martin’s Handbook, 5th ed. Chapter 47 b for more on active and passive tense.)
- Avoid unfamiliar abbreviations and acronyms. You won’t have space to explain them.
- Similarly, avoid references unless absolutely necessary. If you must refer to someone else’s work, you must include the whole reference in parenthesis. (Remember, this abstract is self-contained, so you can’t just assume that the reader has access to the references in your larger paper).
- Don’t use tables, figures, or illustrations. You don’t have room, and you don’t know how they’ll look on the page.
- Refer to specific journals, publishers, or conference volumes for specifications on the desired abstract format for those publications.

See the next page for an example of an abstract from a psychology journal.

ABSTRACT

Source: de Schipper, J. Clasiën; van Ijzendoorn, Marinus H.; Tavecchio, Louis W. C. “Stability in Center Day Care: Relations with Children’s Well-being and Problem Behavior in Day Care.” Social Development 13 (2004):531-52.

Mothers and primary professional caregivers of 186 children, aged 6-30 months, participated in this study in which a new measure for daily stability in center day care was developed, describing staffing, grouping, and program features. Relative contributions of infants' daily experiences of care stability, quality of care, and mother's daily stress to the child's adjustment to day care were analyzed with hierarchical regressions. The child's adjustment was assessed with the Child Behavior Checklist and with the Leiden Inventory for the child's well-being in day care. Children enrolled in fewer care arrangements showed less internalizing behavior and more well-being in the day care setting. Children had higher well-being scores when trusted caregivers were more available. Mother's family management stress was related to more internalizing problem behavior. Interactions between mother's daily stress and stability in care were found to affect the child's adjustment to day care.