

Writing Research Abstracts

Definition of an Abstract

“It is an original work, not an excerpted passage. An abstract must be fully self-contained and make sense by itself, without further reference to outside sources or to the actual paper. It highlights key content areas, your research purpose, the relevance or importance of your work, and the main outcomes.”

It is a well-developed single paragraph of approximately 250 words in length, which is indented and single spaced. The function of the abstract is to outline briefly all parts of the paper.

Types of Abstracts

Three basic types of abstracts are there.

1. Abstract of an intended research project
2. Abstract of an ongoing research project
3. Abstract of a completed research

When you write your abstract mention, what is the type of your abstract is.

If your abstract belongs to type 1 or 2, there is expectation that your intended or ongoing research.

1. Intended research project – Will be completed
2. Ongoing research project – Will lead to a full conference paper or a publication.

Why conference abstract?

- Why are scholars expected to write abstracts?
- Abstracts provide an easy, quick dissemination of information on ongoing *projects of knowledge production* among members of the scientific/ scholarly communities.

Why do share our knowledge/ Research?

- Most recent scientific knowledge is present
- Knowledge sharing with fellow members of scientific community
- Open to challenge and disputation
- Not for public consumption. (It is for the scientific community)

Why conferences?

- Conferences are the forums for members of scientific communities to share information.
- Ongoing research
- Completed research
- Research findings
- Examine and validate or reject new *knowledge claims*

knowledge claims- methodology, interpretation, conclusions, theory, validation of knowledge claims

- There has been always a “*publicness*” in the traditions of knowledge production.
- Conferences, books, papers, abstracts are aspects of that publicness in knowledge production and dissemination.

Components of an abstract

1. Topic
2. A brief statement of what it is on
3. Scope of the research
4. Objective
5. Methods/ Methodology
6. Research problem explored
7. Key questions investigated
8. Hypothesis/ Key Assignments/ Key proposition
9. Key findings
10. Keywords

How an abstract evaluated

Abstracts are usually evaluated using rigorous criteria

Topic

A good topic should have certain qualities

Substantive qualities

- Disciplinary relevance
- Should suggest freshness in research
- Should suggest clear scope of research
- Has the potential to contribute something new to knowledge
- Contemporary relevance to scientific/ scholarly interests
- Relevance to contemporary policy or social change issues

Technical qualities

- Not too short, not too long
- Ideally within 15 words
- No clichés such as “with special reference to”
- Economy of language, no repetition of words unless it is necessary.
- Esthetically attractive
- Should not be like an essay topic or book title.
- Ideally two-part structure
- Spatial and temporal parameters of the research should be given.

Eg: - Gender matters: Women in local political leadership contests in rural Sri Lanka (2000-2005)

In here,

Gender matters → One variable or the concept
Women in local political leadership contests → Description
Rural Sri Lanka → Spatial parameter
(2000-2005) → Temporal parameter

- This two-part structure allows greater creativity.

Research problem

- It is the center of gravity of the research abstract as well as in the research project.
- It should be stated in one sentence, clearly, precisely and sharply.
- It should suggest a research puzzle.
- The puzzle can be formulated as a clear puzzle or a implicit puzzle.
- Definition of the Research problem
 - ✓ Central conceptual problem you propose to resolve through the proposed research.
- Because, research is a problem resolving exercise.

Eg: -

- ✓ Why do Sri Lankans vote at elections in significantly high percentages despite their disappointment with politics?
- ✓ Why does the share of women's representation in legislature in Sri Lanka remain constant since 1961, even though social indicators show high degree of social mobility for women?
- Research problems starts with why/ how and ends with “?”.

In abstracts;

This research examines the following problem: xyz...

Then explain it in the introduction and so on.

In this research intended to critically examine... (Objectives)

If you are going to test a theory, by so doing, I also hope to test the theory of...

This research is significant in that it seeks to provide new evidences as...

Thus, this paper aims to assess the ... (Objective)

Review process

Substantive criteria

- i. Originality
Meaning is something new r makes an original contribution to the knowledge.
Research, problem, argument, evidence
- ii. Based on substantial research
Field/ laboratory/ archival or experimental
- iii. Good literature review
- iv. Presents sufficient data, evidence, information etc.
- v. Methodologically sound/ provides a substantive discussion on method and choice of methods
- vi. Guided by theory
- vii. Substantive discussion on research findings

viii. Conclusion in relation to the research questions and objectives

Technical criteria

- i. Topic
- ii. How the article is structured?
First the introduction. Basic idea of the research. Indicate the main research problem.
Overall picture of the article or the research.
- iii. Background to problem investigated.
- iv. Literature review
By doing literature review, you can say that you are going to do something new to the knowledge. You can not only identify the knowledge gap but also you can locate your research with existing knowledge.
- v. Presentation of an account of the research process
 - a. Proper citations – one consisted method.
 - b. Proper and adequate number of end notes and foot notes
 - c. No plagiarism – correct use of other people's works in an ethical manner
 - d. Either British or American English throughout the paper.