Writing Abstracts

What is an abstract?

An abstract is a stand-alone statement that:

- ✓ briefly conveys the essential information of a paper article, document, or book
- ✓ presents the objective, method, results, and conclusions of a research project
- ✓ has a brief, non-repetitive style

There are two types of abstracts!

Descriptive Abstracts:

- tell readers what information the report, article, paper, or book contains
- include the purpose, methods, and scope of the report, article, paper, or book
- do **not** provide results, conclusions, or recommendations
- are always very short, usually under 100 words
- introduce the subject to readers, who must then read the report, article, paper, or book to find out the author's results, conclusions, or recommendations

Informative Abstracts:

- communicate specific information from the report, article, paper, or book
- include the purpose, methods, and scope for the report, article, paper or book
- provide the report, article, paper, or book's results, conclusions, and recommendations
- are short—from a paragraph to a page or two, depending upon the length of the original work being abstracted
- allow readers to decide whether they want to read the report, article, paper, or book

What makes a good abstract?

An effective abstract has the following qualities:

- ✓ uses one or more well developed paragraphs: these are unified, coherent, concise, and able to stand alon
- ✓ uses an introduction/body/conclusion structure which presents the article, paper, or report's purpose, results, conclusions, and recommendations in that order
- ✓ follows strictly the chronology of the article, paper, or report
- ✓ provides logical connections (or transitions) between the information included
- ✓ adds no new information, but simply summarizes the report
- ✓ is understandable to a wide audience
- ✓ oftentimes uses passive verbs to downplay the author and emphasize the information. Check with your teacher if you're unsure whether or not to use passive voice.

How do I write a good abstract?

To write an effective abstract, follow these steps:

1.Reread the article, paper, or report with the goal of abstracting in mind

- ➢ Look specifically for these main parts of the article, paper, or report: purpose, methods, scope, results, conclusions, and recommendation.
- ➢ Use the headings, outline heads, and table of contents as a guide to writing your abstract.
- ➢ If you're writing an abstract about another person's article, paper, or report, the introduction and the summary are good places to begin. These areas generally cover what the article emphasizes.

2.After you've finished rereading the article, paper, or report, write a rough draft without looking back at what you're abstracting.

- Don't merely copy key sentences from the article, paper, or report: you'll put in too much or too little information.
- Don't rely on the way material was phrased in the article, paper, or report: summarize information in a new way.

3. Revise your rough draft to

- correct weaknesses in organization.
- improve transitions from point to point.
- drop unnecessary information.
- add important information you left out.
- eliminate wordiness.
- fix errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

4. Print your final copy and read it again to catch any glitches that you find.

Sample descriptive abstract:
This article discusses the benefits of parental involvement in reading instructions to children. There are certain design characteristics that home involvement programs should have, such as identifying key goals, providing ongoing training and communication, and providing authentic reading texts. These design characteristics are used to develop and refine a simple home involvement program, called Fast Start. Fast Start contains a procedure, including a daily passage being done together by parent and child.

Sample informative abstract:

We used a multiple baseline across students design to evaluate the effects of an intervention program consisting of vocabulary instruction, error correction, and fluency building on oral reading rate and comprehension of five English-language learners who were struggling readers in a primary school. During the first intervention condition (new passage each session), the first author (a) explained the meanings of new vocabulary words from the session's passage, used each vocabulary word in a sentence, and asked the learner to use each word in a sentence; (b) corrected oral reading errors during the learner's initial oral reading of the passage; (c) asked the learner to read the passage as fast as she or he could for three consecutive trials; and (d) asked five literal comprehension questions about the passage. The same procedures were used during the second intervention condition (same passage to criterion), except the same passage was used across sessions until the learner reached a predetermined number of words read correctly per minute. During the new passage each session condition, the oral reading rate of all five learners showed marked improvements over their performance during baseline. During the same passage to criterion condition, four of five learners reached the predetermined fluency criterion of 100 correct words per minute. The mean number of comprehension questions answered correctly per session was notably higher during both intervention conditions than during baseline.

This page was originally written by Judith Kilborn for the Writing Lab at Purdue University; she revised it for LEO and the Write Place, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, Minnesota. It was revised for use at Kent State University by Vanessa Earp (Spring 2007) It may be copied for educational purposes only. If you copy this document, please include our copyright notice and the name of the writer; if you revise it, please add your name to the list of writers.