

The Abstract

(Originally prepared by David Potter for DGS Students, and modified by Laurie Meintjes)

According to Lester and Lester (2005), every paper written in APA style should include an abstract.¹ “An abstract is a quick but thorough summary of the contents of your paper. It is read first and may be the only part read” (p. 324). The following points apply broadly to the abstract. It should:

1. be accurate, reflecting both the purpose and content of the paper.
2. be self-contained. It should:
 - explain the precise problem (question or topic) and define terminology.
 - summarise the findings [in research projects, describe the method].
 - Give an overview of your conclusions.
3. be concise and specific, around 80-120 words (APA specification).
4. be objective and non-evaluative as far as possible. (In a report it is non-evaluative, but in a qualitative paper it is likely to contain evaluative statements.)
5. be coherent and readable.
6. state the purpose, thesis and scope of the paper.
7. make brief references to the sources used.
8. state your conclusions and the implications of the study.

Five Research Questions

The abstract should answer the five classic investigative questions identified by Eisenberg (as cited in Hay, Bochner, Blacket, & Dungey, 2012, p. 86):

- What did you do? (What question did you research?)
- Why did you do it? (Contextualise the issue you studied in your reading.)
- How did you do it? (In this case, by reading only.)
- What did you find out? (What did you learn from your reading?)
- What do the findings mean?

¹ While the APA style requires APA-formatted papers to include an abstract, not all lecturers will insist on this (“APA frequently asked questions...”). If you are in doubt about whether or not an abstract is required for a particular assignment, consult your lecturer.

References

- APA frequently asked questions. (n.d.). Retrieved from
<http://www.eiu.edu/healthst/APAFrequentlyAskedQuestions.pdf>
- Hay, I., Bochner, D., Blacket, G., & Dungey, C. (2012). *Making the grade: A guide to successful communication and study* (4th ed.). South Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Lester, J. D., & Lester J. D., Jr. (2005). *Writing research papers: A complete guide*. New York, NY: Pearson Longman.