

How to Present an Abstract: Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

All manuscripts require the presentation of an abstract, typically under 300 words, that summarizes the research work. A well-written abstract allows the reader to understand the manuscript's content and the value it can provide. That is why, if we want an abstract to stand alone, we should follow a series of crucial steps and components. This article suggests how to write an abstract, exploring different formats, its components, the roles it fulfills, and specific writing recommendations.

Keywords: abstract, research studies, manuscript preparation, writing skills

Cómo presentar un resumen (abstract): recomendaciones RESUMEN

Todos los manuscritos requieren la presentación de un resumen (*abstract*), habitualmente de menos de 300 palabras, que sintetice el trabajo de investigación. Un resumen bien escrito le permite al autor conocer de qué trata el manuscrito y el valor que le puede aportar. Es por esto que, para lograr un resumen que tenga valor por sí mismo, se requiere una serie de pasos y componentes cruciales. Este artículo tiene como objetivo brindar sugerencias acerca de cómo escribir un resumen, indagando en los diferentes formatos, sus componentes, las funciones que cumple y recomendaciones puntuales sobre la escritura.

Palabras clave: resumen, estudios de investigación, preparación de manuscrito, habilidades de escritura.

INTRODUCTION

All manuscripts, as well as the submission of papers for a conference, require the inclusion of an abstract that contains a summary of the research work. It generally consists of 300 words or less. It is a tool that allows the reader to know the basic information about the topic they are about to read and the value it may provide. It is important to note that the abstract often follows the same format as the article, frequently dividing sections with subtitles. It is advisable to address only one or two main objectives or topics, as there is limited space to convey the information and, because it is the first part you read in the article, it must clearly and concisely state what the document will discuss¹.

The purpose of this article is to provide suggestions on how to write an abstract. For this, recommendations on writing, the objectives it fulfills within the article, the different formats of an abstract, and its components will be presented².

General recommendations on the writing

There are different ways to approach writing the abstract. One of them is using the abstract as a tool for organizing and structuring the manuscript, meaning you draft it beforehand to outline what will be said and how, and based on this, proceed to write the full article. The other, and the most recommended, is to write the abstract at the end once the manuscript has been fully developed and revised.

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That has certain advantages. On the one hand, it allows the authors to be clear about what is most important on the subject and select the most impactful information for the readers. On the other hand, it ensures that the information in the abstract is present in the full-length article and that you present the results correctly. Lastly, it helps establish the relationship between the title and the introduction of the manuscript¹ if sentences, verbs, or nouns are included in these sections, thereby highlighting the keywords that form the core of the article². Once you have written your abstract, it is essential to verify that it adheres to the guidelines of the institution or journal where the work will be published, ensuring compliance with the instructions on font size, line spacing, and word count³. Additionally, it is most important to remember that a good abstract holds value on its own, as it successfully addresses the hypothesis, question, or objective posed³.

We offer some additional recommendations on writing:

- We do not recommend to include the bibliography used in the study.
- Do not refer to tables or images from the text.
- Do not use abbreviations expecting the reader to remember and apply them throughout the full text.
- Do not include information not explained in the article or conclusions not supported by the data and results.
- You may refer to models of articles published by the journal of interest to observe the format and gain examples and tools.
- It is good practice to consult the STROBE (Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology) checklist to ensure that the necessary components of an abstract are included⁴.

Objectives of the abstract

Abstracts have three main objectives. The first one occurs when writing the article, as it allows the author to efficiently organize the results of their work to communicate them effectively. That is put into practice when deciding what you want to convey. While you may have a clear idea of the main results or messages of the article, writing a shortened version can help you synthesize and communicate the findings in a way that highlights their importance and significance. Secondly, when you submit a manuscript for publication, editors focus mainly on its abstract. A strong and well-written abstract can convince editors that the work is worthy of review and potential publication. Lastly, the abstract is the first section readers look at and often the only one they read to determine whether to include your article in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. A well-written abstract stands on its own and entices the reader to

continue reading the paper and include it in secondary studies².

Abstract formats

Before drafting the abstract, it is most important to be aware of the different formats and styles to do so according to the guidelines provided by those who will edit the work.

Regarding format, there are different types. The simple abstract consists of a single narrative paragraph following the structure: introduction, methods, results, and discussion without incorporating subtitles. The structured abstract uses subtitles to separate the sections of the article, thus becoming a compact version of the full text. Another possible format is the descriptive summary, where you state the contents in response to the central question without giving details about the design or conclusions. This abstract format is suitable for articles that do not contain original research data. Finally, the informative style abstract includes the study details, such as the design, methods used, results, and conclusion¹. Regardless of the format used, the most important thing is that the abstract highlights the most valuable information from the paper communicated clearly and concisely.

For scientific articles, it is advisable to use the format: introduction, materials and methods, results, and discussion, including the same questions or concerns that will later be developed⁴.

Components of a scientific article abstract

Generally, scientific articles include an introduction, objectives, materials and methods, results, and conclusions.

The introduction is usually the shortest part of the abstract, and its purpose is to convey what is already known about the topic and the gap in knowledge to fill, that is, what the article intends to analyze and communicate. Additionally, state the objectives alongside the introduction. Then comes the materials and methods section, which is typically one of the lengthiest parts of the abstract as it needs to provide enough information for the reader to understand what you have done and how. Following this is the results section, the most relevant part of the abstract. It is essential to be precise and include the main results³.

Moreover, since the abstract will be limited in length, you should always emphasize the results. Example: instead of saying “We concluded that x happened,” it is better to write “x happened”². Finally, you should include a brief conclusion, which will express the most powerful message and provide the overall perspective of the text³.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest

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