A scientist's guide

How to prepare a good abstract?

Based on good practices promoted by Scribbr and APA recommendations

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Based on good practices promoted by Scribbr and APA recommendations, an abstract that scientific journals and publishing houses expect today should be more than just a few sentences about our publication or a traditional „summary".

Longer abstracts (but not too long!), with a more structured structure, are required by databases for which good text indexing is important. It is worth realizing the fact that we no longer write the abstract of the article only for a „living" reader.

The APA style often used as a model also contains guidance on how to construct an abstract. First of all, it should be treated as a summary of the article, including research problem, our hypotheses, methods and research results.

How to format and write a good abstract?

1. Formatting of an abstract

1.1. The recommended abstract length is up to 250 words.

The minimum number of characters is not usually specified, but it is good if the abstract has at least 200 words (although in the case of the APA style 150 words is referred to as a minimum) – this allows you to include more key words and phrases searched by databases. Abstracts between 200 and 300 words are recommended to the editors of journals even by the Scopus database. For abstracts in Polish volume is often given in the number of characters with spaces (zzs) – abstract in English of approximately 250 words will correspond to the Polish abstract with a volume of 1600–1800 zzs.

1.2. Text formatting can be clearly defined by an editor or publisher, if it is not, it is advisable to adhere to the standards:

- set the page margins to 1 inch (2.54 cm);
- the heading („Abstract" or „Abstract") should be bold, centred and placed at the top of the page;
- place the abstract content under the heading, without indenting the paragraph;
- use a clear font, e.g., Times New Roman (12 pts);
- try to fit between 200 and 250 words.

1.3. Separate keywords must be added to the abstract, most frequently there are between three and five of them.

They are used by databases for indexing and allow others to easily find our publication, so it's a good idea to choose the words that best relate to the research that we write about. Formatting:

- place keywords directly below the abstract content, indented 0.5 inch first line;
- precede them with „Keywords" or „Słowa kluczowe" (italic);
- use lowercase letters (except first names) and separate with commas;
- don't use dots after the keywords.

2. Content of the abstract

Abstract is a stand-alone text that, attached to a publication, informs its reader about the content of the article or book itself. You can write it at any stage, but it always needs to be checked and corrected when you have finished working with the publication.

It is worth taking care of organising the content of the abstract. For this purpose, you can use the sample questions and answer them in one-two sentences:

- **What is the main issue raised in the paper?** – outline the purpose of the research, the questions, theses or hypotheses;
- **What research has been conducted?** – explain the research methods;
- **What has been established by the studies?** – summarize the most important findings/effects;
- **What conclusions can be drawn from the research?** – present an interpretation.

2.1. Research objectives

- Start by identifying the research problem clearly. What practical or theoretical problem does your research solve? What questions do you answer?
- Determine the objective of your research. Use words that describe the actions you took during implementation of the research, e.g., „I analysed", „I checked", „I investigated." You can use the present or the past tense, but you are unlikely to use the future tense – we refer to studies that have already been carried out. Instead of writing: „This study is designed to test the relationship between…" – write: „This study checks the relationship between…".
- You can add here a brief information about the social or scientific context of the research, but without going into details.

2.2. Methodology

- **Indicate the used research methods.** It is best to make this part consists of one or two sentences. You can use the past tense, because the actions have already been taken, e.g., „The survey was conducted among employees and students…".
- **Do not evaluate the methodology** – in the abstract we only have to familiarise our reader with it.

2.3. Research results

- **Summarise the main research results.** You can use the present tense or the past tense, e.g., „The analysis showed that…", „Tests prove…".
- You do not need to include in the abstract all the research results that sometimes may be complex. All you need to do is to highlight the most important findings familiarising a reader with your research

2.4. Conclusions, summary

- Finally, present the main conclusions that can be drawn from your research. Whether and how did you answer/reach your research question/goal?
- If there are significant limitations to your research or the research requires a continuation, mention it.

Avoid quoting sources in the abstract! The abstract should be fully understandable without referring to other sources. Links in abstracts can only be found in exceptional cases, e.g., when the article is a response to another article or directly refers to other studies and would be incomprehensible without the context.

If you find it difficult to fit within the limit of words or characters, we recommend *a short instruction on how to shorten the abstract.*

It is worth remembering that currently **an abstract in English is the most important** and you need to pay attention to grammatical correctness, e.g., the use of an appropriate past tense. If you are unsure of the correctness of the text you have written, it is always worth consulting a professional or read other abstracts in the field of your discipline.

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Not all abstracts must contain each of the elements that have been mentioned above. Specificity of research and the shape of a given publication may imply a change in the structure of the abstract, and the above instructions should only be treated as a guide. It is also worth remembering that the requirements of editorial boards of scientific journals and publishing houses or places where we deposit works, e.g., repositories are the most important. We hope that now writing a good abstract will turn out to be simpler! **Contact us:** *openaccess@lib.uni.lodz.pl*