

Abstracts

An abstract is a condensed version of a much longer document, such as a journal article or report. There are two kinds of abstracts: descriptive, which gives a very brief (2 - 3-sentences) indication of the document's topic, and informative, which provides an accurate overview of the main points of the entire document. An informative abstract is a stand-alone piece, so it is not supposed to be part of the longer document (such as the introduction). In technical/professional writing, it is also sometimes called an *Executive Summary*.

Here are some common strategies for writing an informative abstract:

- Only the MAIN POINTS from the original material(s) are included.
- The style is coherent, not choppy or “list-like.”
- The document is visually clean, using white space and other visual cues (paragraph divisions, headings/sub-headings) to enhance flow.
- There is no bias, personal opinion, or interpretation.
- As a rule, there are no supporting examples or specific details like statistics, sources, quotes, dates, or explanatory materials. Only if a detail is central to the meaning of the document should you include it.

Always check with your professor or TA for other specific assignment requirements.

To condense material effectively for an abstract, you must *paraphrase* the original document. This means using your own wording and sentence structures as much as possible while still retaining the original meaning and content. For more information *about* how and why to paraphrase, see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/01/>.

MORE RESOURCES:

- <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca> -Writing at the University of Toronto
- <http://web.uvic.ca/wguide/Pages/MasterToc.html#Summaries> - The UVic Writer's Guide, University of Victoria
- <http://www.uis.edu/ctl/writing/documents/smreabs.pdf> - Center for Teaching and Learning, Illinois University at Springfield
- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/656/01/> - Purdue University OWL