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THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Scientific Editing and Research Communication Core

Strategies for Writing an Abstract

Consider this: 3 reasons to write a high-quality abstract

- Expand your audience
- Avoid editorial rejection
- Generate excitement about your discoveries

Try this: think of an abstract as a story with the following components

- Beginning: Orient the reader and frame the problem being addressed
- Middle: Relay details of what you did and what you found
- End: Provide a concise statement of the significance of the results and where the story goes next

Use this: a template for constructing a high-quality abstract

- **General introduction (1-2 sentences)**
  - Provide context and background so readers understand what problem your study addresses.
- **Gap in knowledge (1 sentence)**
  - Tell the reader why you performed the study.
- **Overall findings (4-6 sentences)**
  - Present the main conclusion of the study, followed by key details that support this. Relaying the main conclusion first gives your reader context for the supporting data.
  - Weave in descriptions of the methods when discussing your findings, as space permits.
- **Overall takeaway (1-2 sentences)**
  - Identify the conclusions of the research presented.
  - Remind the reader why the outcomes are significant (should relay back to knowledge gap presented earlier).
- **Broader significance (1 sentence)**
  - Relay the findings of the study in a broader context, so the reader understands how they fit in with the big picture presented in the first sentences.

Other points to consider

- The language should be broad enough that those outside the field can appreciate the significance.
- This structure can be adapted to a research manuscript as a whole.

For more information on writing abstracts, check out these resources:

- Example of the above structure mapped onto a Nature paragraph
- PDF of SERCC abstract talk

Upcoming Events

Hardin Open Workshops - PubMed
Dec. 1
12:00pm-1:00pm
Presented by Hardin Library for the Health Sciences
Registration

Hardin Open Workshops - Images in the Health Sciences
Dec. 2
10:00am-11:00am
Presented by Hardin Library for the Health Sciences
Registration

Planning and Writing Successful NSF CAREER Grant Proposals, Virtual Seminar
Dec. 2 & Jan. 7, 14, 21
9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. (8 hours total)
Presented by Dr. Peg AtKisson,
AtKisson Training Group
Registration

NIH K Award Ecosystem: Writing a Competitive K Award, Virtual Seminar
Dec. 6
9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
Presented by Dr. Peg AtKisson,
AtKisson Training Group
Registration

Hardin Open Workshops – Data Management and Sharing Plans for Grant Proposals
Presented by Hardin Library for the Health Sciences
Request a workshop
*Note, NIH will require a data management plan for all proposal starting January 25, 2023.