



5.9

Writing an abstract

Students write an abstract for the article completed in 5.7 Writing a scientific review article. It is recommended that this activity is carried out after the students have completed their final draft.

Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- identify the key features of an abstract
- write an abstract for their own article.

Time required

Allow 30 minutes class time plus homework (or could be done entirely in class, or for homework).

Outline of the activity

In the first part of the activity, students look at an abstract for a review article. They are expected to identify the key features of the abstract. Issue briefing sheet 1 and give them 5-10 minutes to complete the task.

Discuss the findings with the whole class, and get students to share their thoughts on the key features of the abstract. The slide presentation could be used to go through the key features (this also outlines the differences between abstracts for research papers and reviews).

Students write an outline plan for their abstract. This could take the form of a flow diagram or a list of bullet points. This should take 5-10 minutes. The writing of the abstract could be done in class or for homework.

Instruct the students to insert their final abstract below the author's name and above the introduction to their article.

Tips and strategies

A range of articles which could provide additional abstracts are available at:



<http://www.rsc.org/Publishing/Journals/CS/Index.asp>

Students should plan and write their abstract with reference to their own article, rather than trying to do it off the top of their head. If you are doing the whole activity in class, make sure that the students have a copy of their article to hand.



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What is an abstract?

- It is the 'shop window' of scientific activity, and accompanies articles, papers and reviews as well as presentations and posters given at conferences.
- It will generally be the first thing read by somebody when they encounter the article or activity.
- It should be concise and clear, presenting the aims, components and conclusions of the work.



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The key features of an abstract:

- It should:
- Be short (150-200 words).
 - Have 1 or 2 sentences of introduction.
 - Contain a condensed description of the contents of the article and any arguments presented.
 - Contain a description of the most important findings in the article.
 - Contain a 1 or 2 sentence summary of the conclusions / recommendations presented in the article.
 - Be written as one paragraph with no secondary headings.



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How would an abstract for a research paper differ from one for a review?

- A research paper focuses on the use of specific techniques and methodologies to answer a question posed by the researcher. The abstract will make mention of the question, the methodologies and the results / conclusions.
- A review draws together research from a large number of research papers or other sources. As such, the abstract will centre on the themes of the review and the conclusions drawn.



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