

## WHAT NOT TO DO: ABSTRACTS

Sure, looking at what to do is helpful, but sometimes looking at what not to do can be of even greater help. So, what shouldn't you do while writing abstracts?

The following items presume that you know some facts about abstracts: Abstracts are written to allow readers who are doing research in a specialized subject area to decide whether a particular article is worth reading. So the readers know the basics of the subject area and only need summary.

To figure out why your teacher wants you to write an abstract, you'll need to read the assignment prompt and/or ask your teacher.

- Avoid trying to catch your reader's attention or practice any of the hooks that you might use in an introduction.
- Don't withhold your main conclusions. Abstracts *are* plot spoilers; don't try to save your most important results and conclusions for later.
- Don't try to make your most important results and conclusions sexy; save that for the people who read your whole papers.
- Don't practice persuasive rhetorical strategies in an abstract. Readers are very impatient with anything that does not help them answer the question: Should I read this?
- Don't fail to include a very brief summary of each of the main sections of your paper (in science research reporting, for example, you'll need to say a word about what content appears in your introduction, methods, results, and discussion sections).
- Don't organize the items in an abstract in a different order than the main sections of your paper.
- Don't define terms; your reader will know the subject area.
- Don't cite sources. The abstract summarizes *your* main sections, not the work of others: that will appear, most heavily in your introduction.
- Don't say anything that isn't necessary to summarize. Abstracts are typically 50-150 words; longer ones might get to 200 words. That's just not enough space to indulge any content or language that isn't *necessary*.
- Don't pay attention to any of this advice if your teacher wants something else from your abstract.