

STYLE GUIDE FOR WRITING NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The abstract of your paper will be frequently needed so that researchers, but also policy-makers and other laymen public with not much time to read documents, can decide whether to download the paper and read the whole of it.

Therefore, your abstract should be written in a web-friendly way (usually very different from an academic abstract) - these readers

- are generally very busy and need information fast
- know a lot about their subject – they don't need general introductions
- don't want to read something they already know
- don't like long, complicated sentences, instead use bullet points

Please include three items in the non-technical summary:

A/ Full title

B/ Abstract (ideally no more than 400 words, please follow the sample structure below)

C/ Keywords

Below please find more details on how to write the abstract.

- 1. A Step-by-step Guide to writing an Abstract**
 - 2. Using bullet points**
 - 3. Checking the abstract**
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1. A Step-by-step Guide to writing an Abstract

The Abstract

Length: About 400 words. The abstract will be read on screen, not in a book so it needs to be short.

Style guide:

When writing abstracts, do:

- focus on what the paper **actually says**, its recommendations and conclusions, this kind of information is not often included in academic abstracts or introductory paragraphs
- write as clearly and as simply as possible, avoid jargon or specialist terms, if unavoidable, explain the term as fully as possible
- write out all acronyms in full, followed by initials in brackets when using them for the first time e.g 'non-governmental organisations (NGOs)'
- write in the present tense
- avoid complex sentence structure, be direct
- be concise, don't repeat ideas or concepts
- don't use advertising eg "This is the most important paper on this subject for the last ten years...."
- organise the information into short paragraphs, each focused on a concept.
- separate methods, findings and recommendations or conclusions into different sections
- summarise key points using bullet points, can be multiple bulleted lists (eg if there are separate (and interesting) lists of factual findings and policy conclusions/recommendations)

When writing abstracts:

- do **not** use personal pronouns, eg "we then looked at..." instead say "the article looks at" or "looks at"
- do **not** use the words "prove" or "show" eg. "the findings prove that...", "the authors show that..." instead use "the study/the authors find that..." or "the findings indicate that.."

Useful words

Illustrates	Considers
Highlights	Explores
Examines	Indicates
Discusses	Suggests
Looks at	Argues

A sample structure

- Opening sentence – summarise the objective of the paper - what does it look at?
- 1-2 sentences on background – why is it studying it?
- 1-2 sentences on methodology – how does it study it?
- Structure, sometimes this is useful but don't cover this at the expense of the findings or recommendations
- Findings, break into bullets if there are more than 2 key points
- Recommendations or conclusions, again break into bullet points, separate these from findings which should be fact
- Conclusion – this might not be necessary but might be useful to separate opinions or predictions from recommendations

2. Using bullet points in abstracts

Bullet points are used to break up text and make it easy for users to skim the abstract on a screen. Most abstracts will use bullet points to highlight key elements of the paper. However, it is important to use them right.

Bullet points should:

- have an introductory sentence that is constructed to minimise repetition in the bullet points
Eg. The authors find that the government has:
 - reduced taxation
 - created regulatory bodies.....etc etc(This introductory sentence removes the need to mention “the authors” “findings” and “the government”)
- not use extra words like “the findings suggest..” in the bullet point text, this should be in the introductory sentence.
- relate back to the introductory sentence – to check this, try reading the introductory sentence and each individual bullet point as one sentence, if it does not flow then either the introductory sentence or the bullet point should be rewritten, preferably the bullet point
- be only one sentence long, they should not start with a capital letter or finish with a full stop
- contain substantial information, do not use bullet points to list numbers or countries in the study for example

3. Checking an abstract

After writing the abstract it needs to be checked. This could be done by asking the following questions.

Does it make sense?

Is it clear what the paper is for?

Does it give a good idea of what might be found in the paper?

Is it clearly structured?

If it poses a question in the introduction, does it answer it?

Similarly, if it says it is going to examine something, does it?

Does it include findings and policy recommendations?

If it includes recommendations, is it clear what they are intended to achieve and who will benefit?

Is it no more than 400 words long?

Do bullet points follow on from the introductory sentence, do they contain substantial info, are they in the right format?