

HOW TO WRITE A CAPTIVATING ABSTRACT

An abstract appears on its own separate page, after the title page and before the first page of the body. An abstract summarizes your paper's topic, hook, methodology, research limitations, expectations, general findings, and a guide for future studies.

Abstracts should be between 150 to 250 words and are typically required by journals. An abstract gives readers a preview of the pertinent information in your paper.

Abstracts are typically required by professors for longer, more formal academic papers, such as term papers, research reviews, and dissertations. No citation styles, including APA, require abstracts for shorter, less scientific papers.

TIPS FOR YOUR READER'S ENGAGEMENT

1. **Wait to write your abstract until the paper is complete** – The abstract should give a summary of your research conclusions.
 - a. If you write your abstract before the paper is completed, the abstract may look more like an introduction than an abstract.
 - b. Writing the abstract after your initial revisions helps you accurately summarize your paper's big picture.
2. **Provide a compelling, big-picture hook** – You should begin your abstract with a general overview of your topic and background information to peak the reader's interest. Don't get bogged down with writing too many details.
 - a. Show your readers what got you interested: the social/academic relevancy, its applications, and the topic's unanswered questions.
 - b. Let the background be short and simple; get to the problem being addressed by at least the second sentence. Quickly narrow your topic from the broad problem to the specific one.
3. **Make your abstract understandable by itself** – Write out full words rather than using abbreviations, and use simpler terms, avoiding complex jargon that could confuse a beginner.
 - a. Rather than assuming your audience is well-read on the topic, include a sentence or two explaining the scholarly opinion(s).

- b. Avoid citations unless this paper's idea necessarily revolves around past publication.
4. **Mirror your paper's structure** – By signalling your paper's organization, your abstract will help your reader understand the connection between your discussion's ideas. Bring up ideas in the same order your paper does.
- a. Use either the *past or present tense* (this paper investigated or investigates) rather than the *future tense* (this paper will investigate), since the paper has already been written.
 - b. Focus on your research's most insightful contribution rather than shared conclusions.
 - c. Have a clear differentiation between your methodology sentence(s) (how you came up with your findings) and your results sentence(s) (what your findings were).

EXAMPLE OF THE ELEMENTS IN AN ABSTRACT

Abstract

[TOPIC/BACKGROUND INFORMATION] With the hand sanitizer industry's market size estimated to double by 2027, new companies in the consumer side of the market have proposed novel active ingredients to the Food and Drug Administration to diversify consumer options. **[PEAKING INTEREST/SENTENCE HOOK]** One of these is hydrogen peroxide, a chemical potentially more affordable and safer than its alcohol counterparts that could especially be used by developing nations. **[METHODOLOGY]** This study seeks to predict this active ingredient's success on an FDA monograph by testing whether its antimicrobials are at a minimum bactericidal concentration (MBC) sufficient to kill 99.9% of Escherichia coli after an 18-24 hour exposure using Kirby-Bauer well diffusion. **[RESEARCH LIMITATIONS]** Despite the product's non-alcohol labeling, the literature review supports that all three non-active ingredients by the manufacturer contain significant quantities of alcohol. **[EXPECTATIONS]** This review informs a null hypothesis that the sanitizer will kill E. coli within its zone of inhibition during the Kirby-Bauer test, and the null hypothesis that the time-kill assay will not show a 3 log₁₀ reduction of E. coli within five minutes. **[GENERAL**

FINDINGS] Preliminary trials did not support the Kirby-Bauer null hypothesis due to the absence of zones of inhibition but did support the time-kill alternate hypothesis that this sanitizer does not kill 99.9% of *E. coli* colony forming units. **[GUIDE FOR FUTURE STUDIES]** Future research ought to test this product's bactericidal action on *Staph aureus*, another common skin potential pathogen required by the FDA monograph.

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