

Notes on How to Write a Better Abstract

An informative abstract needs to be constructed with the following identifiable sections:

Title: This should be dynamic, concise and conclusive rather than “generally” descriptive. It should be based solely on the simplest presentation and interpretation of the data reported. For example, “Ischemia inhibits cytochrome c oxidase activity in rat coronary artery endothelial cells” is preferable to “Effects of ischemia on mitochondrial enzymes in the vasculature”

Introduction/Background: Permits the reader to focus on key background that will help appreciate the context, relevance and logical step to the rationale of the current study.

Hypothesis: The aim of your study is to test a specific hypothesis. This must be very concise and unambiguous.

Methods: A very brief mention of experimental model, key conditions & type of measurements made.

Results: Statement or figure/table of key findings including measures. The quality of data reported must be clear, hence values (mean±SEM) and group size (n per treatment) must be included.

Conclusion: Stick to the key finding and simplest interpretation or significance.

DON'TS:

- Do not fail to define abbreviations (keep number down to only a few, or avoid).
- Do not cite references in abstract (it is meant to be about your study).
- Do not include complex tables or graphics with small label font (bar graph is best).

DOs:

- Start & finish the abstract early. Rushing creates poor quality or errors.
- Double check data and values to be used.
- Follow abstract submission directions carefully, use templates as instructed.
- Get supervisor and co-authors to contribute to second & subsequent drafts.
- Have an independent person proof read the final abstract and another to comment on scientific significance.
- Correct all typographic errors.
- Check for prizes, awards or travel support and scrutinise abstract submission conditions.