

## Tips on Writing Abstracts

Reference: Porush, David. 1995. *A Short Guide to Writing About Science*. Harper Collins College Publishers. New York, New York. 275 pp.

### 1. What is an abstract?

“An abstract is an accurate representation of the contents of a document in abbreviated form” (Porush, D. 1995). Generally, its length is that of a long paragraph. The trick to writing a good abstract is to balance sufficient information against brevity. The abstract is also a research tool; abstracts help researchers gather the maximum amount of information in a minimum amount of time.

### 2. Why does one write an abstract? Why are they important?

An abstract is important because:

- a. It conveys to readers what lies ahead in the complete paper/article.
- b. It may be the only portion of the article that is read.
- c. It is the only portion of the article that is copied into electronic databases and/or search indices.
- d. It can get you free airfare, dinners, and after-hours parties with others in your field.

### 3. What is a good abstract like? **See Checklist, next page.**

### 4. What is an Executive Summary, and is it different than an abstract?

Yes, the executive summary and abstract are different in two ways. First, the executive summary’s audience is assumed to be more general. The executive summary is appropriate for essays or technical reports, or other documents that may be read by non-specialists. Second, the executive summary is frequently longer than an abstract because the executive summary includes:

- A brief description of the project, along with the regulatory and/or political conditions surrounding the project.
- A complete report of the results and discussion. A few graphics are acceptable.
- Conclusions and recommendations.

In a three-inch-thick report (assume 1-1/2 inches are appendices), the executive summary may be three to ten pages long.

### **CHECKLIST FOR ABSTRACTS:**

- ❑ All sentences are complete and grammatically correct. The need for brevity does not mean that fragment sentences are okay!
- ❑ The abstract “stands alone” and one need not refer to the article’s text or graphics to understand the article’s over-all ideas and concepts.
- ❑ Each sentence conveys a crucial piece of information.
- ❑ Most abstracts are one paragraph long; resist the urge to start a new paragraph because the main topic or subject of one sentence is different from the next. Logical flow and connections between sentences are even more important to avoid a “jerky” feeling while reading.
- ❑ Write about completed work, not work that will be performed. Abstracts should include results, not a description of what the researchers expect to find; this is especially important when submitting an abstract for a conference proceedings.
- ❑ Omit raw data and any graphs, tables, or other representations of the data.
- ❑ Omit methods used to collect or analyze the data (unless the article itself is about the methodology).
- ❑ Omit detailed discussions of competing theories or methods.
- ❑ Omit detailed discussions of related work, that is, the literature review.