

## Towards an ideal abstract in academic writing: Some crucial components

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**Abstract:** It is required for every research, journal paper, and academic thesis or dissertation to have a scientific summary of the whole work. This paper aims to present some components of writing an ideal abstract in academic writing. A systematic literature review and personal observation were done to achieve this aim. It was found that an ideal abstract should have a title, author's name and other details, an introduction, the aim of the study, methodology, findings, conclusion, and some recommendations based on the study's findings. It was also noted that around five keywords must be included at the end of the abstract. Conclusively, if the highlighted components are written methodically, they will collectively provide a clear and organized overview of the research thereby helping readers and assessors to easily grasp the purpose, methodology, findings, and implications of the study. It was also recommended that scholars should always meticulously write abstracts for their scholarly works to enable readers and assessors to quickly decide on the work.

**Keywords:** Abstract, Academic writing, Dissertation, Journal paper, Scientific writing, Thesis

### 1. Introduction

Every research, journal paper, or article, and academic thesis or dissertation requires a sort of brief and articulate summary at its beginning to give a brief overview of the entire treatise (Jamar, Šaupperl & Bawden, 2014). An abstract in academic writing is simply a summary of the writing. It is "a miniature version of the whole—a short piece of technical writing designed to summarise either a longer piece of work such as a paper, book chapter or dissertation or to serve as a sales pitch for a presentation either in the form of a conference poster or a lecture" (Gaw, n.d: 4). An ideal academic abstract usually consists of words between about 150 and 300 words depending on the type of writing (Chukwuere & Chukwuere, 2020). A journal paper abstract is usually less than a thesis or dissertation abstract. The length of an abstract may also depend on the style of a journal or academic institution. An online source identified "several types of abstracts, which vary in length and content. These include informative abstracts, descriptive abstracts, critical abstracts, and highlight abstracts" (Abstract, n.d). In Tullu's (2019: 14), abstracts "can be structured or unstructured. They can also be classified as descriptive or informative abstracts."

Although an abstract is a summary, it is not just a summary like writing a brief form of a piece of writing. Writing an abstract varies from one academic discipline to the other be it humanity, social sciences, applied sciences, natural science, education, engineering, or what have you. This makes writing an academic abstract in any discipline to be technical and one must be well versed in the technicality of writing an ideal abstract to be able to write one. Harris (2006: 136) asserted, "Abstract writing requires knowledge and comprehension...." Against the backdrop of the aforementioned facts and the fact that "the literature on abstract writing is remarkably thin" (Kaplan, Cantor, Hagstrom, Kamhi-Stein, Shiotani & Zimmerman., 1994: 401), even to date, this paper aims to present some components of writing an ideal abstract in academic writing.

## 2. Significance of an abstract in academic writing

An abstract is necessary in academic writing because of many reasons. One, it provides brief information about the writing. Two, it allows one to briefly overview the writing. Three, it serves as a summary of the writing that can be included in an advertisement for a lecture or academic conference. Fourth, it can serve as a summary for an assessor to decide on a given writing. Five, it allows readers to quickly resolve to read or not to read your paper without bothering to go through the whole paper. Six, journal editors usually use it to decide whether to go ahead with the publication process of a paper or not. An online source added another importance of an abstract. According to the source, “An effective and well-written abstract helps readers understand the scope of your paper and whether the information is relevant to their studies. An abstract is also useful for indexing in online databases” (How to Write an Abstract in 7 Steps).

## 3 Components of an ideal abstract

An ideal abstract should include several crucial components to effectively summarize the research paper. Chukwuere and Chukwuere (2020) adapted the anatomy and abstract questions from Meo (2018) in Figure 1 below.

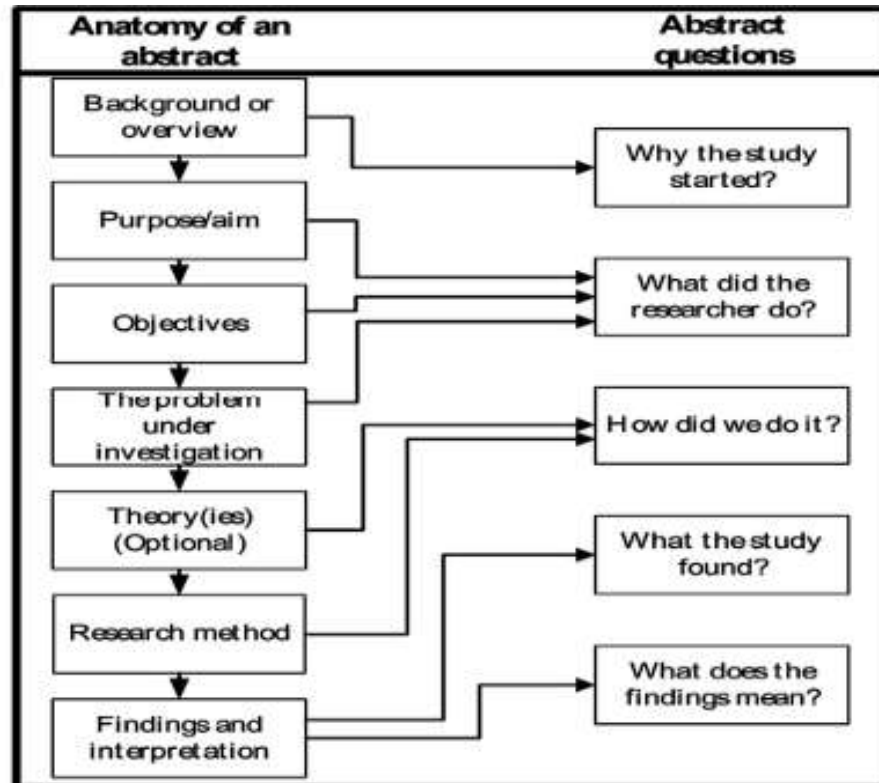


Figure 1: The Anatomy and Abstract Questions (Chukwuere and Chukwuere, 2020)

While all abstracts may not contain all components, it is essential to take into consideration most of these components. The components are:

### 3.1 Title

The title of a paper or thesis may not be part of an abstract. However, it is important to include when sending an abstract out. This will give the abstract a unique identity from other abstracts even from the same author. The title should be succinct, attractive, and give a clue to what the abstract and the paper are all about. Gaw (n.d: 12) thought of the title as the “*abstract* of the abstract.” Tullu (2019: 13) opined, that a title “should have ‘just enough details’ to arouse the interest and curiosity of the reader so that the reader then goes ahead with studying the abstract and then (if still interested) the full paper.” More will not be said about the title of a paper because that is not the scope of this paper.

### 3.2 Author’s name and other details

These may also not be a part of an abstract. If the abstract is not part of a paper or thesis, that is if it will be published separately in a conference proceeding, poster, or any other form of advertisement, it is necessary

the name of the author or authors (if more than one author) and some other details be included in the abstract after the paper/thesis title. The name should be the official name preferably with the surname coming last and at times in all capitals. There may be exceptions in the styles of some journals or academic institutions on this arrangement. Whichever way, the surname must be easily recognized. Other author's details to be included are the author's institutional affiliation, email address, phone number, and ORCID. An ORCID is "a free, unique, persistent identifier (PID) for individuals to use as they engage in research, scholarship, and innovation activities" (ORCID for Researchers). These details are some of the things that readers or assessors look at to determine whether to pay attention to the abstract or not.

### **3.3 Introduction**

This contains the crucial background to the study. It is the introductory part of the abstract. It should be brief and appealing to the reader. It is usually around two to three sentences. It briefly tells of the lacuna or gap the study is filling. This may be in the form of a statement of the problem the researcher is attempting to solve leading to the aim of the study. It usually answers the question, "What is known and why is this study needed?" (Cals & Kotz, 2013: 585). Furthermore, the introduction of any good abstract should start with the definition or description of the core word (or words) or phrase in the title. This short description or definition must be carefully worded to wet the appetite of the readers. It may not be more than one or two sentences, but it must carry the weight and concept of the paper. What should follow immediately is the efforts of the previous researchers and the area where they have not emphasized at all or the gap in the literature.

### **3.4 Aim**

An ideal abstract should give a concise summary of what the author is aiming to accomplish during the research. This can also be referred to as the objective of the study, although sometimes, there is one main aim and several specific objectives in a study (Tullu, 2019).

### **3.5 Methodology (or Methods)**

This part of the abstract states simply how the study was carried (or will be carried) out (Cals and Kotz, 2013). This has to do with research methods. This should be done in two or three sentences. It is necessary to also briefly include here the population of the study, sampling techniques adopted, method and instrument for data collection, and method and instrument for data analysis.

### **3.6 Findings**

This is the main part of the abstract. It itemizes the findings of the study whether through a systematic literature review or empirical study. There may be difficulties in accurately stating the proposed findings of yet-to-be-done research (Simkhada, Van Teijlingen, Hundley & Simkhada, 2013). This is in congruence with the objectives of the study.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This usually summarizes the findings or results of the study. It emphasizes the significant outcomes and practical importance of the research and what the study has contributed to knowledge. Regoniel (2021) opined, "The conclusion, in particular, should be given special attention in writing the abstract. The conclusion should be well supported by the findings of the investigation; not a sweeping statement without any valid argument or evidence to back it up."

### **3.8 Recommendations**

These are the extension of the conclusion. Both parts may be written together. These parts may be written separately. All the recommendations in the study may not be written here. Nevertheless, it is expected that two or three recommendations should be given based on the findings. This should be done in a simple, clear, and readable logical manner.

### **3.9 Keywords**

Keywords are not really parts of the components of an abstract. However, they are required to be listed separately from the paragraph of the abstract. They are keywords that give the variables in the title of the

research. Furthermore, they are important words from the title and scope of the study (Tullu, 2019). Usually, five keywords are expected to be listed here and arranged alphabetically regardless of their importance in the study.

#### 4 Contributions to the body of knowledge

This paper contributes to the body of knowledge by introducing researchers to some components that should be meticulously included in an ideal abstract in academic writing. These components will enable readers and assessors to easily grasp the purpose, methodology, findings, and implications of the study through mere reading the abstract.

#### 5 Conclusion

If these aforementioned components are written meticulously, they will collectively provide a clear and organized overview of the research paper thereby helping readers and assessors to easily grasp the purpose, methodology, findings, and implications of the study. Therefore, it is recommended that scholars should always methodically write abstracts for their scholarly works to enable readers and assessors to quickly give an understanding to decide on the work.

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