University at Buffalo
College of Arts and Sciences

How to write a strong abstract

Help readers quickly understand your work and why it matters

Your abstract is a short summary of your research or creative project. It gives readers a clear snapshot of what you studied or created, how you approached it and why it is important. A strong abstract is clear, focused and easy to understand, even for readers outside your field.

Think of your abstract as an invitation. It should make someone want to stop at your poster or attend your presentation to learn more.

A strong abstract should:

- Clearly state your main question, goal or creative focus
- Briefly explain your approach or process
- Highlight key findings, insights or outcomes
- Explain why the work matters
- Use clear, concise language and avoid unnecessary detail

Remember, your audience will include students and faculty from many disciplines. Write for clarity and accessibility.

Abstract guidance by discipline

Natural sciences and mathematics

Abstracts in the natural sciences and mathematics often follow an IMRaD-style structure: introduction, methods, results and discussion.

INCLUDE:

- **Purpose:** What problem or question are you addressing?
- **Methods:** What experimental design, tools or analysis did you use?
- **Results:** What did you find? Include specific data or trends when possible.
- **Conclusion and implications:** What do the results mean and why are they important?

EXAMPLE LANGUAGE:
“Using X method, we measured… Our results show a significant increase… These findings suggest…”

Humanities and social sciences

Abstracts in the humanities and social sciences often focus on argument, interpretation and insight rather than experiments.

INCLUDE:

- **Topic and research question:** What issue, text, artifact or social phenomenon are you examining?

- **Framework or approach:** What theory, method or analytic strategy guides your work?
- **Argument or findings:** What claim are you making or what patterns did you uncover?
- **Significance:** Why does this matter for your field, community or broader conversation?

EXAMPLE LANGUAGE:
"This project argues that… Through textual, archival, ethnographic or statistical or spatial analysis of…, we show that… This contributes to our understanding of…"

Arts and creative work

Abstracts for creative projects focus on concept, process and artistic intention.

INCLUDE:

- **Creative focus:** What did you create and what is it about?
- **Inspiration and process:** What materials, methods or influences shaped the work?
- **Themes or interpretation:** What ideas or questions does the work explore?
- **Relevance:** Why is this project meaningful artistically or culturally?

Abstract checklist

Use this list before you submit.

Your abstract should:

- Clearly state your main question, goal or creative focus
- Briefly explain your approach, method or process
- Highlight key findings, insights or outcomes
- Explain why the work matters
- Use clear language that students and faculty from other fields can understand
- Stay within the required word limit
- Avoid jargon or explain it briefly when needed

Final check:

- Someone outside your major can summarize your project after reading it
- Every sentence adds new information
- The abstract matches what you will present