

## **WHAT IS AN ABSTRACT?**

An abstract is a short statement about your paper designed to give the reader a complete, yet concise, understanding of your paper's research and findings. It is a mini-version of your paper.

## **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF AN ABSTRACT?**

A well-prepared abstract allows a reader to quickly and accurately identify the basic content of your paper. Readers should be able to read your abstract to see if the related research is of interest to them.

## **WHAT SHOULD BE IN AN ABSTRACT?**

A model abstract should contain the following elements:

Statement of the purpose of your study the research methods/methodology used to arrive at your results and/or conclusions the results observed the conclusions drawn from your study

These elements do not necessarily have to be presented in the order shown above. How the elements are sequenced in your abstract depends on the audience for whom the abstract is intended. For example, if the audience is exclusively or mainly interested in quickly applying new knowledge, then perhaps you would want to place your most important conclusions and results first, followed by the purpose of the study, methodology, and other findings and details. Abstracts in the humanities and social sciences should also contain the above elements. All research, be it in the sciences or the humanities, should have a stated purpose. Research methods in social sciences may differ substantially from the experimental methods of physical sciences but an abstract, whatever the discipline, must address the methodology of the research. Studies in the humanities and social sciences find results and draw conclusions; these results and conclusions must be included in the corresponding abstract.

## **HOW TO STRUCTURE AN ABSTRACT**

*Many of the following suggestions come from the American National Standard for Writing Abstracts published by the Council of National Library and Information Associations.*

- Explain the purpose of your study/paper. Ideally in one sentence, state the primary objectives and scope of the study or the reasons why the document was written. Also state the rationale for your research. Why did you do the research? Is the topic you are researching an ignored or newly discovered one?
- In terms of methodology (research methods), clearly state the techniques or approaches used in your study. For papers concerned with non-experimental work (such as those in the humanities, some social sciences, and the fine arts) describe your sources and your use/interpretation of the sources.
- Describe your results (the findings of your experimentation), the data collected, and effects observed as informatively and concisely as possible. These results may be experimental or theoretical, just remember to make note of that in your abstract. Give special priority in your abstract to new and verified findings that contradict previous theories. Mention any limits to the accuracy or reliability of your findings.
- Your conclusions should in essence describe the implications of the results: Why are the results of your study important to your field and how do they relate to the purpose of your investigation? Often conclusions

are associated with recommendations, suggestions and both rejected and accepted hypotheses.

## AN EXAMPLE OF A WELL-STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

*Dryland Grain Sorghum Water Use, Light Interception, and Growth Responses to Planting Geometry*. L. Steiner. Crop yields are primarily water-limited under dryland production systems in semiarid regions. This study was conducted to determine whether the growing season water balance could be manipulated through planting geometry. The effects of row spacing, row direction, and plant population on the water use, light interception, and growth of grain sorghum [*Sorghum bicolor* (L.) Moench] were investigated at Bushland, TX, on a Pullman clay loam (fine, mixed, thermic Torrertic Paleustoll). In 1983, which had a dry growing season, narrow-row spacing and higher population increased seasonal evapotranspiration (ET) by 7 and 9cvo, respectively, and shifted the partitioning of ET to the vegetative period. Medium population crops yielded 6.2 and 2.3 Mg/ha of dry matter and grain, respectively. High population resulted in high dry matter (6.1 Mg/ha) and low grain yield (1.6 Mg/ha), whereas low population resulted in low dry matter (5.4 Mg/ha) and high grain yield (2.3 Mg/ha). Row direction did not affect water use or yield. In 1984, dry matter production for a given amount of ET and light interception was higher in the narrow-row crops. Evapotranspiration was less for a given amount of light interception in the narrow-row crops and in the north-south row crops. Narrow row planting geometry appears to increase the partitioning of ET to the transpiration component and may improve the efficiency of dryland cropping systems.

## Additional Tips

1. Write your paper first, and then write the abstract.
2. A good abstract should not exceed 250 words. (Remember that each word in print can cost up to \$0.12.)
3. Proofread your abstract several times -- submit your very best work.
4. A good abstract is usually followed by a good paper. The opposite also tends to be true.
5. A reader does not want to wade through complicated and unfamiliar terms in the abstract.
6. Know your audience and target your abstract accordingly.
7. Have a peer read your abstract and then tell you what your research is about. If he or she has difficulty explaining your research, chances are your abstract requires revision.

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