

## Abstract<sup>1</sup>

“An abstract is an accurate representation of the contents of a document in an abbreviated form”. An abstract can be the most difficult part of the research report to write because in it you must introduce your subject matter, tell what was done, and present selected results, all in one short (about 150 words) paragraph. As a result, you should usually write the abstract last.

You will need to write an abstract when your dissertation for a higher degree (M.S. or Ph.D.) is accepted, when you submit an article for publication, or when your report will be disseminated to an audience that needs a summary of its contents. You may not have to write an abstract for reports written for a course; check the specific guidelines for your course to see if one is required.

An abstract serves an important function in a research report; it communicates the scope of your paper and the topics discussed to your reader, and, in doing so, it facilitates research. Abstracts help scientists to locate materials that are relevant to their research from among published papers, and many times scientists will only read a paper’s abstract in order to determine whether the paper will be relevant to them. Considering your audience and their needs will help you to determine what should be included in your abstract.

Ask yourself:

- Why would another researcher be interested in this research?
- What are the most important aspects of the research? What should a reader be sure to know about the research?
- What information will the reader have to have in order to understand the most important aspects?
- What are the main points from each section of your report?  
Summarize each section in one sentence, if possible.

The most common type of abstract is the informative abstract. An informative abstract summarizes the key information from every major section in the [body](#) of the report, and provides the [key facts](#) and [conclusions](#) from the body of the report. A good way to develop an informative abstract is to devote a sentence or two to each of the major parts of the report. If space permits, you can provide contextual information such as background of the problem and the significance of the research, but you can also omit contextual information because the abstract is not supposed to serve as an

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<sup>1</sup> From the University of Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)  
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/reportW/abstract.html>

introduction to the subject matter of the report—your [introduction](#) will serve that role. You can also omit citations for your sources in the abstract. If you summarize information that you borrowed from other writers, you do not have to repeat the citation in the informative abstract. You should, however, include key numerical facts to make the informative abstract brief. Readers will not be surprised to see numerical data in an informative abstract.

Be sure to summarize rather than describe your report in an informative abstract. Phrases such as “This report discusses” or “Several solutions are considered” describe what the content of the report will be rather than actually summarize the report’s main points or solutions. Someone reading your informative abstract should have a clear, albeit limited, understanding of the scope and nature of your research, as well as the conclusions you reach.

The following abstract, from an article titled “Are Green Lots Worth More Than Brown Lots? An Economic Incentive For Erosion Control On Residential Developments,” was published in Soil and Water Conservation. In 147 words, this abstract clearly and concisely conveys the main points from the seven- page article that follows it. Notice how the abstract clearly summarizes information from each of the report’s major sections:

Introduction	Construction sites are major contributors to nonpoint source (NPS) pollution. However, a lack of personnel to enforce erosion control regulations and limited voluntary compliance means that few developers apply effective erosion control.
Research Problem	New approaches are needed to increase erosion control on construction sites if this source of NPS pollution is to be significantly reduced.
Body	This study tests whether an economic advantage exists for developers who use vegetative cover for erosion control, independent of advantages gained in addressing environmental or regulatory concerns. Improving residential lot appearance from muddy brown to green grass may increase the appeal of the lot to buyers.
Results	A market survey shows that homebuyers and realtors perceive vegetated lots to be worth more than unvegetated lots, and this increased value exceeds the cost of seeding.
Conclusion	Thus, developers can now be encouraged to invest in vegetative cover because of the potentially high return on the investment.