Guidelines for Writing a Scientific Abstract

Public Health Importance

Scientific abstracts helps to facilitate the review of technical parts of a paper in a quick manner. Abstracts allows readers and researchers to identify knowledge and main points of the paper to decide if the full paper is worth reading, helps readers to understand a text through an outline of key points and index articles for quick recovery in electronic databases.

Structure and Content

The scientific abstract is between 250-275 words in length. The word count excludes the subheadings of the structured abstract (background, methods, results, conclusions), title, author list, address, or keywords. A word count is easily obtained by selecting the appropriate text of the abstract and then choosing the "Word Count" command in the "Tools" menu of MS Word. A scientific abstract should contain the following seven criteria: 1) background and rationale for study, 2) appropriateness of methods, 3) presentation of results, 4) conclusions and interpretation of results, 5) significance to public health, 6) recommended intervention and estimation of public health impact, and 7) overall clarity of abstract.

The following abstract format is recommended:

1. **Authors**
   - First author (presenter). Type the full first name and middle initial, if any, before the last name (e.g., Jorge L. Lopez).
   - Co-authors. List each co-author in order of contribution by typing one initial followed by the last name (e.g., G. Diaz, S. Barajas).

2. **Title**
   - Be brief. Avoid subtitles if possible.
   - Capitalize major words only. Capitalize the second component of hyphenated terms.
   - Do NOT use abbreviations or acronyms in title.
   - Give geographic location (country, state or city) and dates of study or investigation. Do not abbreviate geographic locations; separate them from the rest of the title by an em dash, e.g., "outbreak of Pneumonia – Texas, 1995."

3. **Abstract Text**
   1. Structure the abstract, using the following subheadings to identify each section: **Background, Methods, Results, Conclusions.**
   2. Each subheading should be typed flush left, in bold font, and followed by a colon.
   3. The **Background** section should address both the public health significance of the subject and the scientific background and rationale for the study.
   4. The **Methods** section is a step-by-step description of the physical work that was done. This is written in paragraph style and does not include any results.
   5. The **Results** section should be a plain description of what your exact results were. Discussion as to what the results mean is NOT included here.
   6. The **Conclusions** section discusses the results as to how they address the hypothesis/questions.
   7. Since an abstract is a citable document, the **Results** section must contain data. It should not include such statements as "Data will be discussed."

4. **Key Words**
   - Please include 4-6 key words; use terms listed in the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) from the Index Medicus (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh/meshhome.html).

Common Errors Found in Scientific Abstracts

General

1. The title is neutral and is only a summary of the methods.

Background

2. The background section is too long.

Methods

3. The methods section labels what was done instead of describing it.
4. The methods used to analyze the data are not mentioned.

Results

5. The results do not present enough data.
6. Some results appear first in the conclusion section.

Conclusion

7. The conclusion repeats data already presented in the results.
8. The recommendations are not based on the data presented.

Format

9. The abstract exceeds the word limit.
10. The abstract does not follow the recommended structure or the recommended format.
11. The abstract contains references.
12. The abstract is not self-contained.
13. The abstract is not written using complete sentences.