

Writing an Abstract

WHAT IS AN ABSTRACT?

An abstract is a brief yet accurate and comprehensive summary of your article or essay. The abstract is informative, dense with information, and concise. In other words, an abstract requires a writer to say as much as possible in as few words as possible.

The abstract may be the most important paragraph of your paper because it is the first thing the reader will see. After reading the abstract, the reader will decide whether or not to continue reading the entire article or essay.

A good abstract contains:

- only information that appears in the body of your paper; it is a summary, **not** an evaluation;
- terms not commonly known (for example, medical terms or scientific terms) and their definitions;
- an accurate reflection of what is written in the paper;
- concise language. Do not use any “filler” phrases or sentences; every sentence should be relevant to your article or essay; and an
- active voice and third person point of view (that is, no “I found...”).

Where does the abstract appear in my paper?

- The abstract appears on a separate page after the title page. Like the title page, a short version of the title (APA) or your last name (MLA) and page number appears in the header (upper right hand corner) of the abstract. Note: MLA format does not officially require a title page, in which case the abstract would appear on the first page after the formatted heading. Abstracts are not commonly required in Chicago-Style papers unless they are dissertations or theses; however, you should always consult your professor.

How do I format the page?

- For both APA and MLA format (requiring a title page), the term “Abstract” appears one inch from the top of the second page and centered. Unlike other paragraphs, there should be no indentation of the abstract. Note: abstracts written using Chicago Style format should contain no endnotes.

How long is the abstract?

- In APA format, the abstract should be no longer than 120 words. Therefore, being specific and concise is extremely important in order to provide an accurate and comprehensive summary of your entire article or essay.
- In MLA format there is more freedom as to the length of the abstract, though 250 words is the most common.

NOTE: APA format has different criteria for abstracts depending on what you are working on, such as a report or an empirical study, a review, a theoretical article, a methodological paper, or a case study. For these specific criteria, refer to the APA Publication Manual section 2.04.