

# HONORS COLLEGE GUIDE TO WRITING AN ABSTRACT

## PURPOSE

For conference papers, research papers, theses and dissertations, you will almost always be asked to write an abstract. The main point to remember is that it must be short, because it should give a summary of your research. In fact, not only are abstracts short, they must almost always be a certain, specified length. You must find out how long your abstract should be and strive to come close to - but not go over - this limit. Abstracts that exceed the maximum word limit are often rejected because they cannot be used for databases, summaries of conferences, etc.

An abstract should briefly:

1. Re-establish the topic of the research
2. Give the research problem and/or main objective (this usually comes first)
3. Indicate the methodology used
4. Present the main findings
5. Present the main conclusions

Obviously if you only have 150 words, you can only cover each of these areas briefly. The emphasis is generally on the main findings and main conclusions since these areas are of most interest to readers.

## COMMON PROBLEMS

**Too long:** If your abstract is too long, it may be rejected. Abstracts are entered into databases and there are usually a specified maximum number of words allowed. Abstracts are often too long because people forget to use word count.

**Too much detail:** Abstracts that are too long may also contain unnecessary details. The abstract is not the place for detailed explanations of methodology or for details about the context of your research problem because you simply do not have the space to present anything but the main points of your research.

**Too short:** Shorter is not necessarily better. If your word limit is 150 but you only write 80 words, you probably have not written in sufficient detail. You should review your abstract and see where you could provide more useful clarifications. Remember that in many cases, readers decide whether to read the rest of your research from looking at the abstract. Frequently, writers do not give sufficient information about their findings.

**Failure to include important information:** Be sure to cover the points listed above. Often writers do not cover all of them because they spend too long explaining a particular aspect, such as the methodology, and then do not have enough space to present their conclusions.