Abstracts**[[1]](#footnote-1)**

# What is an abstract?

An abstract is a summary of a longer article or work that retains the tone and writing style of the original work while leaving out most of the details.

# What is the difference between a summary and an abstract?

Though these terms are used interchangeably, there is a distinct difference between summaries and abstracts. Summaries are shorter versions of any given work and can be about any given part of a work, whereas abstracts give an overview of the entire work.

# What are abstracts used for?

* The purpose of an abstract is to help the reader decide if he/she wants to read the article in full.
* Likewise, the abstract is helpful during the research process as it informs the researcher on the subject matter of the article without reading the work in full. The researcher then may decide if he/she wants to use the article in his/her essay.

# What types of abstracts are there?

* There are two main types of abstracts: **descriptive** and **informative**.
* A **descriptive** abstract contains the work’s purpose, scope, and methods. The descriptive abstract is the most commonly used. APA papers typically use descriptive abstracts to preface the essay.
* An **informative** abstract contains the work’s purpose, scope, and methods, and other information such as conclusions, results, or recommendations.

# How long are abstracts?

* Descriptive abstracts are usually 100 to 250 words long and are written as a single paragraph containing the purpose, scope, and methods as previously mentioned.
* Informative abstracts are usually 250 to 500 words long and are written as two paragraphs where the first contains the purpose scope and methods, and the second contains other information such as conclusions, results, and recommendations.

# Can abstracts be cited?

* Generally, it is more appropriate to cite the article itself, rather than the abstract.
* Citing the abstract is often inappropriate because sometimes the author of the abstract is not the author of the work.

What does an abstract look like?The reverse side of this handout has two examples of abstracts. One is a descriptive abstract provided by the University of Wisconsin, and the other is an informative abstract from Macmillan Publishing. The full citations for these sources are provided in the footnotes.

Example Descriptive Abstract  
Notice that it is only a single paragraph composed of 107 words and details the purpose, scope, and methods for the work’s research.

This research looks at the work of Margaret C. Anderson, the editor of the *Little Review*. The review published first works by Sherwood Anderson, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, and Ezra Pound. This research draws upon mostly primary sources including memoirs, published letters, and a complete collection of the *Little Review*. Most prior research on Anderson focuses on her connection to the famous writers and personalities [with whom] she published and associated. This focus undermines her role as the dominant creative force behind one of the most influential little magazines published in the 20th Century. This case example shows how little magazine publishing is arguably a literary art.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Example Informative Abstract  
Notice that this one is about the same length as the previous descriptive abstract, but this one includes the results and conclusion of the research.

This study investigated the role of "signaling" in helping good readers comprehend expository text[s]. As the existing literature on signaling, reviewed in the last issue of the journal, pointed to deficiencies in previous studies' methodologies, one goal of this study was to refine prose research methods. Two passages were designed in one of eight signaled versions each. The design was constructed to assess the individual and combined effect of headings, previews, and logical connectives. The study also assessed the effect of passage length, familiarity and difficulty. The results showed that signals do improve a reader's comprehension, particularly comprehension two weeks after the reading of a passage and comprehension of subordinate and superordinate inferential information. This study supports the hypothesis that signals can influence retention of text-based information, particularly with long, unfamiliar, or difficult passages.[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. Brusaw, Charles T., et. al.*Business Writer’s Handbook*, ed. 5, St. Martin’s Press, 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Estante, Sophia and Lorrie Moore. “Humanities Abstract ‘Margaret C. Anderson’s Little Review.’” *Madison Writing Center.* University of Wisconsin, 2016, www.astate.edu/a/ortt/research-development/create-@state-files/Examples%20of%20Research%20Abstracts\_1.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Houp, Kenneth W. and Pearsall, Thomas E. *Reporting Technical Information*. 7th edition, Macmillan Publishing, 1992, www.tcnj.edu/~asper/infoabstract.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)