

# Abstract Writing Guidelines



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# Outline for Abstract Writing

## **Background - Two to four sentences**

- Salient literature findings
- What has been accomplished
- Only most up-to-date and/or review

## **Rationale - One or two sentences**

- What's missing from above literature

## **Purpose of study - Two or three sentences**

Research question(s), aims/objectives OR hypothesis

## **Theoretical Approach - One sentence**

**ONLY** include if theory was used to guide hypothesis and analysis

Note: exploratory or descriptive studies often are not based on theory

## **Methods - Five to seven sentences**

### **Sample selection**

- Description and number of subjects
- For population or community studies include size of total population as well as number of selected subjects
- For biological sciences, describe how specimen was collected

### **Measures and/or techniques**

- If using scales or surveys, include name and/or general description
- Briefly describe instrumentation, materials

### **Quantitative or qualitative analysis –**

- Indicate statistical methods or how data was analyzed

## **Results - One or two sentences**

- Generally, results or preliminary results must be included
- In some circumstances, anticipated results will be accepted

## **Implications – one or two sentences**

- Where will this research lead? What research needs to follow?
- If human subjects are used, how will results help guide clinical practice, or be applicable at the “bedside?”

# Tips for Writing Abstracts

## Voice

Use Active Voice

For example, “We randomly selected 100 patients.”

NOT “Randomization was used to sample 100 patients.”

## Tense

Use either present or simple past tenses:

For example:

“The California Health Interview Survey uses a large community sample.”

OR “The California Health Interview Survey used a large community sample.”

NOT “The California Health Interview Survey has used a large community sample.”

## Sentence Length

Avoid run-on sentences or long lists.

For example:

“We developed a sampling frame to select hybrid corn so we could examine how viral DNA applied to lower stalk leaves communicates with upper stalk leaves, and patterns of cellular changes after viral exposure to immature kernels.”

**BETTER:** We systematically sampled hybrid corn to examine: 1) how lower stalk leaves exposed to viral DNA communicate with upper stalk leaves; and 2) how the cells of immature kernels change after viral exposure.”

## Substance versus “fluff”

Avoid “throw away” sentences because every word must count in an abstract.

For example, “The results of this study have implications for cancer care.”

**BETTER:** “The results of this study indicate that, among individuals over age 65 years, twice fractionated irradiation should be considered over daily irradiation schedules in order to reduce fatigue.”

## Qualifiers/Adjectives/Adverbs

Use descriptives sparingly. Avoid words that connote value judgments or are imprecise, such as “very,” “important,” “hopefully,” “we think,” “wonderful,” “excellent,” “provocative,” etc.

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