

# Writing Abstracts

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# Writing Abstracts

- Overview of the day
- Discuss general goals of abstracts
- Explain strategies that can help you write effective abstracts

# Writing Abstracts

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- There is no “secret code” to instantly becoming a better writer
- If a secret code did exist, second (and third) revisions would be a thing of the past
- However, there are a handful of strategies that can help you refine your writing

# Writing Abstracts

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- **First: know what questions to ask yourself at every stage and section of your writing**
- **Introduction: how am I framing my research question?**
- **Methods: what is the connection between my research question and methodological framework?**



# Writing Abstracts

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- Knowing what questions to ask is an effective way at establishing transferable writing skills
- Critical, self-reflexive questions allow writers to adapt to new scenarios and situations
- Having an “instruction set” for writing one type of paper won’t help you write in other formats/genres

# Writing Abstracts

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- Second: “good” writing should be approached from the perspective of structure (not simply style)
- The questions you ask yourself should be structural in nature
- You will learn how to refine your style after you have found some models to mimic

# Writing Abstracts

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- **Third: find models or samples that work for you**
- **Start by mimicking writing strategies that you find productive or effective**
- **How does an author transition between sections? How do they acknowledge limitations in their work? How do they frame their findings?**

# Writing Abstracts

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- These strategies are starting points
- Writing is like any other skill, you get better the more you do it
- Being a “good” writer is more about speeding up the strategies I just mentioned (as opposed to writing perfectly the first time every time)

# Writing Abstracts

- Let's turn to the main focus for today's lecture

# Writing Abstracts

- Abstracts are the first thing a reader sees but the last thing an author writes

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- Abstracts are the first thing a reader sees but the last thing an author writes
- Abstracts  $\neq$  an introduction to a document
- Abstracts = an overview that summarizes the goals, structure, and findings of a document

# Writing Abstracts

- This means that abstracts need to be comprehensive enough to summarize a document and concise enough to avoid over-saturating your audience with too much info



# Writing Abstracts

- This means that abstracts need to be comprehensive enough to summarize a document and concise enough to avoid over-saturating your audience with too much info
- Goal for today: talk about a common structure for writing abstracts which can be applied to different circumstances

# Writing Abstracts

- One structure often used is called the IMRaD method

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- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- (and) Discussion

# Writing Abstracts

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- Identify the aims of each section
- Also present some questions that you can ask yourself while writing each
- Knowing what questions to ask yourself while writing is an effective way for becoming a better writer

# Writing Abstracts

- **Introduction: identify the purpose of an article**

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- Introduction: identify the purpose of an article
- Why is your research important given current scholarship, trends, or circumstances?
- What specific research question are you posing or trying to answer?



# Writing Abstracts

- **Methods:** explain how you plan to answer or explore your research question

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- **Methods:** explain how you plan to answer or explore your research question
- What specific theoretical frameworks or processes will be deployed in the article?
- How was data gathered, coded, and analyzed?

# Writing Abstracts

- Results: identify the MOST important finding

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- Results: identify the MOST important finding
- How did your methods elicit particular observations in your evidence/data?
- In what ways do these findings answer, expand, or modify your initial research question?

# Writing Abstracts

- Discussion: explain larger significance of your findings

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- Discussion: explain larger significance of your findings
- How might other scholars build upon your results?
- How can your findings provide the foundation for future research?

# Writing Abstracts

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- Some publication outlets require authors to divide the abstract into separate sections
- This format is often called a structured abstract
- A publication may have its own unique title for sections (i.e., “Implications” instead of “Discussion”) but you are still using the IMRaD formula



# Writing Abstracts

- Other publication outlets or formats don't require separate sections

# Writing Abstracts

- Other publication outlets or formats don't require separate sections
- This means the abstract is a single paragraph
- In these cases, you are still satisfying the same general goals of an IMRaD abstract

# Writing Abstracts

- When writing abstracts, make it easy for yourself

# Writing Abstracts

- Let's say you need to write a 300 word abstract

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- Let's say you need to write a 300 word abstract
- A first draft of your abstract might look like this:
  - Introduction: about 75 words
  - Methods: about 75 words
  - Results: about 75 words
  - Discussion: about 75 words

# Writing Abstracts

- After you have a complete draft of your abstract, you can revise it according to the standards of whichever outlet or genre you are writing within

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- After you have a complete draft of your abstract, you can revise it according to the standards of whichever outlet or genre you are writing within
- An abstract for a proposal might have less time dedicated to discussion
- An abstract for a meta-analysis might have more time dedicated to methods and results

# Writing Abstracts

- Quickly review writing practices to avoid



# Writing Abstracts

- Don't quote outside sources

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- Don't quote outside sources
- If there is a source that needs to be referenced, you can briefly include bibliographic info in the abstract (identify author and text in your writing)
- Referencing outside sources may happen in outlets dedicated to a specific theme or author (such as special issues of journals)

# Writing Abstracts

- Don't write in future tense

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- Don't write in future tense
- “This paper will discuss...” vs “This paper discusses...”
- Writing in the future tense adds unnecessary words to the total word count

# Writing Abstracts

- Avoid using first person pronouns

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- Avoid using first person pronouns
- Even if journals allow for the first person in articles, abstracts typically don't use "I" or "we"
- You can say "the authors" but focus on what the article itself does in terms of ideas, experiments, and/or findings

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- Some publication outlets require a list of key terms along with the abstract
- You can assume that your audience will read an article if they are interested in your key terms

# Writing Abstracts

- Lastly, do not exceed word counts

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- Lastly, do not exceed word counts
- If no word count is stated, it is usually safe to assume 150-250 words as the standard
- However, you can also reach out to a publication outlet to clarify any word counts

# Writing Abstracts

- The ORS Research Design and Data Analysis Lab has resources to help with all stages of the research process
- Recordings of our webinars
- Consultants are available for one-on-one meetings