

Writing an Abstract

An abstract is a brief, stand-alone summary of a work that provides readers with an overview of the whole piece. It is commonly used in academic outputs such as conference papers, journal articles, theses, essays, and research reports. Since formatting rules vary across disciplines, it is important to follow the conventions required in your field.

An abstract should

- Briefly convey all the essential information of your work
- Contain the key terms associated with your work
- Have a succinct, non-repetitive style
- Be succinct. The exact length varies according to the type of abstract
- Give a clear picture of why and how the work was conducted and what conclusions were reached



The abstract comes **first**, but you write it **last**.

Begin with a draft	Group information	Rephrase	Revise
Begin with an outline of your work: • Highlight the objectives and conclusions from your Introduction and Conclusion • Underline keywords from the Methods section • Highlight results and findings from the Discussion section.	Group the above information into a single paragraph, then • Condense any definitions or explanations • Identify and remove repeated ideas • Condense any background information to address only the gap your research is filling.	• Rephrase if necessary to present a clear narrative to your reader.	• Keep revising until your abstract contains only essential information, in the fewest possible words, and cut out the obvious, such as: "This paper examines..." or 'The first chapter provides a description of ...

Two types of Abstracts

There are two main types of abstracts:

- Descriptive abstract – Provide a brief outline of the work, stating its purpose, scope, and methods, but without detailed results or conclusions. They are very short.
- Informative abstract – Summarise the entire work, including purpose, methods, results, and conclusions, giving readers a clear understanding of the key findings and contributions.

**Remember:**

Descriptive = outline only

Informative = summary

Sample Descriptive Abstract

Title: *A Māori pedagogy: Weaving the strands together*

Abstract

Literature on Māori pedagogy up until now has been disparate, some dealing with methodological issues, some with learning theory, some with environment and so forth. This article seeks to build one comprehensive picture of Māori pedagogy by weaving the myriad disparate themes in the literature into one unifying model. It is based on an EdD study researching Māori teacher educators' perceptions of pedagogy.

Stucki, P. (2012). *A Māori pedagogy: Weaving the strands together*. Kairaranga, 13(1), 15–19. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ976653.pdf>

Sample Informative Abstract

Title: *Assessment of learning, for learning, and as learning: New Zealand case studies*

Abstract

Research about the benefits of formative assessment as a means of improving student learning has encouraged policy-makers and teachers in countries like the UK, Australia and New Zealand to promote and use classroom-based assessment for learning in the qualifications arena. However, recent research suggests teachers are implementing a narrow interpretation of formative assessment in classrooms using techniques that focus on assessment procedures and practices to assure students comply with criteria and achieve awards for external qualifications. This variation on 'teaching to the test' has led to the coining of the phrase 'assessment as learning' to indicate the instrumentalism that results from such restricted practice. This paper reports on findings from case studies of two schools in New Zealand where secondary school students are learning how to perform science investigations under direction, for a curriculum standard that is a component of a national standards-based qualification. The findings reveal that students' assessment and learning experiences reflect the emerging international trend of 'assessment as learning', but strategies for redressing some of the undesirable aspects of this limiting form of formative assessment in this New Zealand context are identified.

Hume, A., & Coll, R. K. (2009). Assessment of learning, for learning, and as learning: New Zealand case studies. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 16(3), 269–290.



Related resources:

Literature Review

Structuring an Abstract