Do you want to make a good first impression?

What is the first part of your thesis that most people will read? The abstract. And if you want to make sure that it's not the last thing they read, your abstract needs to be well-written.

On this page, you'll find some hints and suggestions about how to improve your abstract, including some ideas about what to include, and some tips on how to make your writing more concise. You can also look at some sample abstracts from past theses.

What is an abstract?

It is a stand-alone text, approximately 200-300 words, that provides a snapshot of your whole thesis. After having read your abstract, your reader should be able to answer the following questions.

Click on each question button to see more:

Developing the abstract for the thesis

If you are having difficulty in developing your abstract, the following suggestions might be useful.

Suggestions:

- Make sure that your abstract answers the questions listed above
- Concentrate on communicating the facts
- Try not to make any general statements. The Abstract should be the essence of your thesis
- Try not to include any in-text references; the information in the abstract shouldn’t need external evidence
- Does it tell a very short story: does it have a beginning, a middle and an end?

Writing concisely

As there are quite tight word limits for abstracts, it is important to make sure that every word counts, and that there is no unnecessary information. The following suggestions can be used to make your abstract more concise, while still being...
Ways of tightening up your writing:

- Use digits for all numbers, except those that begin a sentence.
- Use the active voice, avoiding 1st person pronouns.
- Report rather than evaluate
- Use verbs rather than noun equivalents
- Avoid phrases that convey no real information: make concrete/specific statements
- Substitute one word for many: ‘at this point in time’ = now; ‘on a yearly basis’ = yearly
- Delete adjectives/adverbs
- Put the most important information first in each sentence.

Remember: practices can vary. Check with your supervisor and read examples of abstracts in your field to get a clear idea of the conventions.

See next: Sample abstracts