

How to write a great abstract and title

You're almost there with your paper, but now is not the time to take your eye off the ball. Many people will only ever read your title and abstract – so it pays to spend some time getting these right.

Write your abstract **AFTER** your paper

1

Some authors say it's best to write the abstract **BEFORE** the paper as it gives a structure to follow. However, if you write your abstract **AFTER** completing your paper, you will have developed your opinions and important messages while writing, which will make your abstract easier to write and your messages clearer.

Stick to the journal's guidelines

2

Read the journal's guidelines again. As well as a word count, many will stipulate a specific structure for the abstract. Follow this to the letter and use the exact sub-headings if these are given.

Don't exaggerate your findings

3

Your abstract should reflect the findings of your study fairly; don't exaggerate a point if it can't be justified in your research. On the other hand, your abstract is the best opportunity you have to 'sell' your paper, so make it engaging and relevant.

Make your title specific, but interesting

4

Your title is your first chance to capture a reader's interest. It can be a question or a statement, or you can have fun with the words. But make it specific and where necessary – for example in quantitative studies – always capture what sort of study it is (e.g. randomised controlled trial) and where it took place.

Seek honest feedback

5

Finally, ask someone who has never seen your paper before to read your title and abstract. If they can easily understand the essence of your article from what you have summarised, you're on the right track. If not, rewrite and keep getting feedback.