

APA Format: Abstracts



This handout is based on the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Seventh Edition, 2019.

An **abstract** is a “brief, comprehensive summary of the contents of the paper” (APA, 2019, p. 38). (In some fields of study, this is called an *executive summary*.) Based on the abstract, readers often decide whether to read the entire paper. The abstract must be brief (usually 250 words or fewer), but include all main points of the paper. It reiterates the focus of the paper; it does not comment or evaluate on ideas of the paper. Its organization generally mirrors the organization of the paper (to check, compare the abstract to the paper headings).

Abstracts are NOT required in student papers unless specified by the instructor. If required, follow these guidelines.

Conventions:

- The abstract is on the second page of your document (**after** the title page and **before** the beginning of the paper itself).
- Title the page **Abstract** in uppercase and lowercase letters, centered, boldfaced, at the top of the page (below the page number).
- Type the abstract in a **single paragraph** (double-spaced) in **block format** (no indenting).
- **Do not cite references** in the abstract, with one exception: If your study continues or replicates previous research, you should note this in the abstract, and cite the author’s last name and the year of the original report.
- Use **active voice verbs** whenever possible (but avoid personal pronouns, such as *I* or *we*).
Active voice: Laboratory technicians tabulated the results of the experiment.
Passive voice: The results of the experiment were tabulated by laboratory technicians.
- Use **present tense verbs** when describing conclusions and results that are currently applicable; use **past tense verbs** to describe primary research you conducted (e.g., the variables you manipulated or the outcomes you measured.)
- Keywords are not required for student papers. (They do appear in professional abstracts.)

To keep the abstract concise:

- Use digits for all numbers 10 and above, except those that begin a sentence. (Consider rewording a sentence that begins with a number.)
- Use abbreviations (e.g., *CDC* for *Centers for Disease Control*), but remember that all abbreviations that need to be explained in the text must also be explained when used for the first time in the abstract.

Consult the *Publication Manual* p. 38 and pp. 73–75 for detailed guidelines on abstracts for specific types of papers:

- Empirical study
- Literature review
- Theory-oriented paper
- Methodological paper
- Meta-analysis

Example:

2

Abstract

The nursing profession recognizes the phenomenon of anxiety as a nursing diagnosis and has studied it in depth. Anxiety is defined as a vague subjective feeling of apprehension stemming from an unknown threat to an individual. Anxiety is divided into four stages: mild, moderate, severe, and panic. Sister Callista Roy's theory of adaptation approaches anxiety holistically, stressing the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and spirit. Martha Rogers' theory of energy fields explains anxiety as a phenomenon that is capable of being transmitted between persons.