

Abstracts

An abstract is a short summary of a larger work, such as a research paper, presentation, or poster (18). As a graduate student, you will be required to write an abstract as part of your practicum experience. Public health students and professionals also frequently submit abstracts as part of a selection process to present at professional conferences including American Public Health Association's (APHA) annual meeting. Therefore, understanding how to write an abstract is crucial for your educational and professional development.

The guidelines for writing an abstract vary depending on the conference or assignment. "In general, an abstract should tell the reader these five things: 1) What you did; 2) Why you did it; 3) How you did it; 4) What you found; and 5) What it means" (19). It usually has the following sections (19,20):

- **Introduction/ Background:** What is the purpose of your paper/presentation? What public health problem does it address? Define the public health problem and its scope.
- **Method:** Describe your research method or program.
- **Results:** Describe your specific results or projected outcomes.
- **Discussion:** What is your conclusion/ recommendation? What is the significance of your program/ research? What its impact on the public health problem?

Stylistically, abstracts should follow the four Cs:

- **Complete.** Cover major parts of project/case/study
- **Concise.** Contains no wordiness or extra information
- **Clear.** Readable, well organized, and not jargon-laden
- **Cohesive.** Flows smoothly between parts (21).

It is important to stay within the prescribed word limit. If you are instructed to stay within 250 words, do not exceed the limit. Many conferences will only accept the abstract up to the word limit; the rest will be ignored.

Tips for Writing an Abstract for a Conference

Writing an abstract for acceptance to a conference or journal is similar to writing a sales pitch (21). You are trying to convince the reviewers what you can give them and why you should be selected. Here are some tips to writing a successful abstract:

- Research the conference
 - What types of abstracts have they accepted in the past?
 - What are their guidelines?
 - What are the conference theme and learning objectives? How can you tie your abstract into their overall goals?
- Research the field
 - What are the buzz topics in your field?

- How is your research innovative and unique?
- Make your title descriptive and catchy
- Once you have written your abstract, proofread your work! Reviewers often reject abstracts with grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors.

For more resources on writing abstracts, visit:

- [Abstract Handout from UNC Writing Center](#)
- [Preparing and Submitting an Abstract to APHA by BUSPH](#)