MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY
1910

FACULTY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Abstract Writing Guide

An abstract is a short and concise summary of your manuscript and/or study. Most peer-reviewed manuscript start with an abstract, so that readers can ascertain if the manuscript is of use to them. In fact, often times, the abstract is all that people read, so it had better be useful, clear, accessible and engaging.

Here is a handy template for you to write an abstract for an experimental study, and/or to understand how to interpret one.

Title

There are two types of titles, **descriptive** or **declarative**. Descriptive titles merely tell the reader what the study is about. Declarative titles go a step further and tell the reader the result. There is no right way to write a title. Although declarative titles may give the reader more information, sometimes the study is too big and/or the results too complex to provide it in a declarative way.

Example of a descriptive title:
"Blood gases, acid-base and regional cerebral blood flow regulation during incremental ascent to high altitude"

Example of a declarative title:
"Cerebral blood flow regulation during incremental ascent to high altitude is a unique function of arterial pH"

Abstract Body

Background: 1-2 sentences introducing the background and telling the reader **what it is about and is known**.

Rationale: One sentence telling the reader **what isn't known**. This is the **rationale** for the study.

Aim and hypothesis: One or two sentences stating the **aim** and **hypothesis**. An aim is a general purpose of the study, and the hypothesis is a directional stance on what the researchers thought would happen to a dependent (responding; measured) variable(s) if they manipulated an independent variable(s).

The aim and hypothesis should flow from and be consistent with the background and rational provided.

Methods: 1-3 sentences about **what was done**. Only the most important details should be included, given the word count you have to play with.

Results: 1-3 sentences about **what was found**. The best results sections will contain specificity (e.g., mean values, variability and P values) and directionality (e.g., "larger" vs. "different").

Conclusions: 1-2 sentences about **what it means**. This is a mini discussion/conclusion, where the possible significance can be stated clearly, and perhaps why the reader should care and/or what a future direction might be.

Additional Notes

Notice how templated this is. If you follow this template, you will be able to write a clear and concise abstract that the reader can follow easily, and find all of the information they need quickly. Notice also that this follows the same outline as an experimental manuscript. Each sentence of an abstract will likely reflect a number of paragraphs in the paper.

Note about posters: When you make a poster, you'll note that a poster is basically a visual abstract, and should be laid out in a similar way to one. Because a poster is a visual abstract, you need not provide the abstract on the poster itself.

The abstract is written in **past tense** (what you did and what you found), but should not be in **passive voice**.

Passive voice: It was hypothesized…
Past tense (but active voice): We hypothesized that…

Length: Abstracts are typically 200-250 words long. Some journals/conferences ask for something shorter, and some give you more room. Follow directions. ***The Faculty of Science and Technology Research Day has set a maximum of 250 words.***