How to write an abstract

Roger Sturmey, PhD, FHEA

Basic Science Officer – SIG Embryology

Senior Lecturer – Hull York Medical School

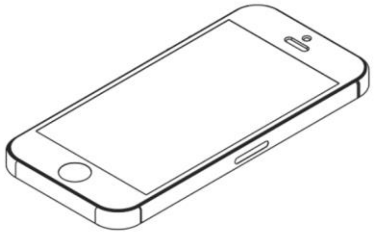
eshre

SCIENCE MOVING PEOPLE MOVING SCIENCE

Overview

- Purpose of an abstract
- Before you start
- The ‘writing’
- The ‘after-writing’
- Things NOT to do
- Good abstracts are…
- Bad abstracts are…
- Top tips
- Summary

Get involved… Join the conversation



1

Grab your phone

2

Go to www.menti.com

3

Enter the code 46 37 28 and vote!

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”

What is an abstract…

- Short, condensed summary of a piece of work (usually research) that is usually novel.
- Often your FIRST publication
- Means of communicating PRIOR to the meeting

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”

Purpose of an abstract

- **Short, succinct summary of the work of which you are so proud!**
- **The ‘call’ to get others interested in your work…**
- **Only part of your work that is:**
  - ***Published***
  - ***Available to delegates***
  - ***Available to reviewers***

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”

Before you start

- Do you have something to report?
  - Study/research
  - Results
- Have you submitted/published it already?
  - Content should be original/unpublished
  - Not presented at another international meeting
- Did you do a piece of research?
  - Audit usually not accepted
  - Opinions not usually accepted
- Strong, clear research question – and research conducted well

"Abstracts with no data/findings, or statements such as 'will be presented' are rarely accepted"

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question "What makes a good abstract?"

eshre
SCIENCE MOVING PEOPLE MOVING SCIENCE

The ‘writing’…

- **CHECK THE GUIDELINES!**

https://www.eshre.eu/ESHRE2019/Programme/Call-for-abstracts

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”

Title – *25 words max*

Study question – *25 words*

Summary answer – *25 words*

What is known already – *100 words*

Study design, size, duration – *75 words*

Participants/materials, setting, method – *75 words*

Main results and the role of chance – *200 words*

Limitations, reasons for caution – *50 words*

Wider implications of the findings – *50 words*

Study funding/competing interests

Trial registration number – *25 words*

See: https://www.eshre.eu/ESHRE2019/Programme/Call-for-abstracts/Abstract-content-and-format

The ‘writing’…

- **Think of:**
  - **Category**
  - **Audience – who do you *want* to read your work?**
- **Plan the writing – DRAFT**
  - **Mind map?**
  - **Notes?**
  - **Single summary sentence…**
- **Clear results – begins with the findings…**
- **Get started…**

“Remember; no one sees the first [or any] draft until you let them”

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”

The scariest sight for any writer …

Just start writing…

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”

The ‘writing’ Pt 2…

- Do you have something to report?
  - Negative results are fine; no results are not
- Is your study clear and understandable?
  - Experimental design and n-numbers
- Have you appropriately analysed and tested your data?

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”

The ‘writing’… When to start?

- **As early as you can!**
- **Data/findings should be gathered BEFORE you start writing**
- ***It’s a bit late to start thinking of a project a month before the deadline…***

“The longer that you spend on the work, the better it will be…”

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”

The ‘after writing’

- **Proof read – does it make sense?**
  - **Back to that ‘start early’ - leave time to proof read**
- **Circulate to all co-authors – with enough time for them to read and comment**
- **Check the language and structure**

“The language of science is English – if this isn’t your first language, it is really worth finding a friendly native speaker to check your abstract

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”

The Submission

- **There is a deadline**

FEBRUARY 1, 2019!!!

- **Try to submit early to give your self time for any unexpected events.**

"there is nothing like a deadline to focus the mind… and stress you out…"

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question "What makes a good abstract?"

Things to think about…

Your abstract will be reviewed by quite a small panel of reviewers. They review in their 'spare time' and usually have more than 100 abstracts to review. If you are 'kind' to your reviewer – make it easy to read, make the importance of the work clear etc etc, you make their job easier. If an abstract is easy to read, it's more likely to have a favourable outcome

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question "What makes a good abstract?"

The review

Abstracts	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Submitted	1457	1798	1764	1731	1901
Accepted	55%	56%	58%	60%	53%
Poster	85%	87%	87%	86%	88%
Oral	15%	13%	13%	14%	12%

- **Talk or poster???**
  - **There is limited time in the programme; as the number submitted increases, the chances of oral is reduced – currently approx 1 in 10 selected for oral…**

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question "What makes a good abstract?"

Things to think about…

- **Your abstract will be reviewed – not all are accepted…**
- **It is the ONLY component that reviewers, and readers, can judge your work by – so make it as effective as possible.**
- **If accepted, can you go to present it??**

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”

Things NOT to do

- **Figures/tables/images/graphs do not usually feature in abstracts – *describe your findings***
- **Use too many abbs. and if you do, make sure you exp. on 1st use**
- **Wait until the last moment to write/submit the abstract…**

"following OVP, we did IVM before ICSI/IVF. After IVP, we did HPLC, LCMSMS, FLIM, FLIP, FLAP, FRAP using a LSCM to look at dep/app of R, A, Q, W and Y

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question "What makes a good abstract?"

eshre
SCIENCE MOVING PEOPLE MOVING SCIENCE

Good abstracts are…

The title of your abstract is key – Ensure that there is a strong concluding sentence with a clear take home message.

..is precise and tightly written with every word counting - an opening 'context' sentence – a resume of methods or design used where relevant – have results with p values/replicate number – end with a significance sentence.

…covers all aspects of the study concisely, gets the message across, can be digested by any scientist (not just a specialist), is sufficient information (80-90% of the time) for a citation

…has the answer in the title, does not over-interpret/ extrapolate the conclusions, the right balance of data detail but is not completely full of numbers and p-values. States the big picture implications. Clearly states the problem under investigation.

…has a valid research question, a clearly defined primary outcome, good description of methodology and statistics, accurate presentation of results with p values, admit possible limitations of the study, and conclusions based on the study findings and not the authors' personal interpretation.

…is clearly laid out; I like to see PICO i.e. the study population is clearly defined, as is the intervention and control. I like to know the type of study and the aim should highlight the primary outcome measure and any secondary outcome measures. The study should be adequately powered to assess these outcome measures and being the geek that I am I like to know what statistics they have used and if it is hypothesis driven on the basis of what prior knowledge (i.e. one-tailed) or attempting to disprove a null hypothesis (2-tailed) and how/ have potential covariates been considered. Finally and probably most importantly, do the results support the conclusion?

…is one which has a clear single sentence hypothesis or research question which is clearly answered in the discussion or conclusion

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question "What makes a good abstract?"

eshre
SCIENCE MOVING PEOPLE MOVING SCIENCE

A bad abstract…

I hate seeing abstracts with **no data**, sample size or statistical comparison.

Don't start an abstract with "The effects of ??? …… were studied……" This indicates that there is **no clear hypothesis** and that the article probably does not contribute very much to the field. Don't repeat the title in the opening sentence of the abstract - avoid redundant text – strike a balance between hard facts (data) and key messages.

Badly written, poorly constructed
No obvious or **logical hypothesis**
Fails to address the intended hypothesis
Fails to use appropriate or relevant statistical testing of data
Makes claims that cannot be substantiated from the evidence presenter
Irrelevant or does not add anything to the science, almost **an abstract for the sake of it**

A weak abstract… **misses out significant sections**, has too much detail, is unclear, contains **too much jargon**, does not say why the study is important

A weak abstract is typically characterised by making **bold claims about the data**, rather than sticking to the job of interpreting the study objectively.

For me a bad abstract – **lacks any results and**/ or the number of participants is not given. There is **no basis** given for the study – i.e. no reason given for conducting the study, no hypothesis. If the methods imply that ethical approval would have been required and this is not confirmed, this is problematic. Furthermore, if the conclusion is not supported by the results or overly states the findings, this is also likely to result in rejection.

A weak abstract…**alludes to work** that has not yet been done but will be done in time for the presentation, **spelling and/or grammatical errors** (there is no excuse), too many abbreviations

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question "What makes a good abstract?"

eshre
SCIENCE MOVING PEOPLE MOVING SCIENCE

Top tips…

- Make sure that you have a story to tell!
- Tell it – clearly
- Check the guidelines
- Check it, then check it again.
- Get someone else to check it
  - Co-authors
  - Supervisors
  - Trusted friends
- Proof read
- SUBMIT!

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”

Summary - What do YOU think makes a good abstract?

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”

With thanks…

- Titia Van Roy
- Christine Bauquis
- SIG Embryology
  - Giovanni Cottichio
  - Susana Apter
  - Ioannis Sfontouris
  - Debbie Montjean
  - Monica Marques
  - Yves Guns
  - Leonie Van Den Hoven

- Anonymous reviewers from across the world…

Go to menti.com, use the code 46 37 28 and answer the question “What makes a good abstract?”