

## SUMMARIES and ABSTRACTS

### **THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A SUMMARY AND AN ABSTRACT**

The terms *summary* and *abstract* are often used interchangeably resulting in some confusion. This problem arises because there are two distinct types of abstracts – *descriptive* and *informative*. The informative abstract is another name for a summary; the descriptive is not. The descriptive abstract is usually only 2 or 3 sentences in length, hence it is not a summary or very informative.

An informative abstract (summary) is an abbreviated version of the most significant points in a book, article, report or meeting. It is usually about 5% to 15% of the length of the original. It is useful because it condenses material, informing the reader of the original's most important points.

### THE CONTENTS OF AN INFORMATIVE ABSTRACT

The most obvious problem in writing this abstract is deciding what to include and what to omit. Following are some suggestions to help you to overcome this problem.

#### Include:

- ✓ *Purpose*: An abstract should identify why the article was written. A brief introduction should reveal the main purpose of the article.
- ✓ *Important Specifics*: Include only those names, dates, places or costs that are essential to understanding the original.
- ✓ *Conclusions or results*: Emphasize outcomes of surveys/tests, research conclusions, and proposed solutions to the problem.
- ✓ *Recommendations or implications*: Include important recommendations, along with other pertinent information.

#### Omit:

- *Opinion*: Don't include your own opinions.
- *New Data*: Don't compare the work with other articles, books or conferences; stick only to that information included in the original.
- *Irrelevant Specifics*: Don't include biographical data about the author.
- *Examples*: Illustrations, explanations and descriptions are unnecessary in an abstract.
- *Background*: Material in introductions to articles provides information and anecdotes that are of little importance to understanding the article.
- *Reference Data*: Exclude information from footnotes, tables and bibliographies.
- *Jargon*: Technical language or jargon may confuse the reader.

### **THE SEVEN STEPS TO PREPARING AN INFORMATIVE ABSTRACT**

1. *Read through the material completely to get a general idea of its content.*
2. *Re-read the material* as often as is necessary to locate all of the main points. Pay special attention to the first and last sentences of each paragraph. The first usually identifies the topic and the last usually summarizes the paragraph. Look for these types of key words to identify the main points:
  - a. Words that enumerate: first, second, third; next; initially, finally.
  - b. Words that express causation: thus, as a result, because, therefore.
  - c. Words that express contrasts and comparisons: however, although, despite, furthermore, in

addition, likewise.

3. *Organize the information you have gathered into an initial rough draft.* At this point your draft will contain more information that will appear in your final version. Feel free to use the language of the original now.
4. *Read through your rough draft and delete whatever information you can.* Condense or eliminate main points if possible. Make sure that you have accurately maintained the emphasis of the original.
5. *Put the edited version into your own words.* Make sure you've eliminated unneeded words. Once again, compare your version with the original to double-check facts.
6. *Don't include remarks that repeatedly call attention to the fact that you are writing a summary.* For example, "On page 7 of the article, the author discusses sexual discrimination in the workplace."
7. *Identify the source you've just summarized.*

### EVALUATIVE SUMMARIES

Evaluative summaries differ from other abstracts and summaries in only one way: your opinion of the material is included in the evaluative summary. You should blend your assessment throughout the entire summary and not just lump all of your opinions at the end. This lets the reader know what you thought of each point addressed in the article. These are some questions that you should answer for readers of your evaluative summary.

#### Content Evaluation:

- ▶ How carefully is the subject researched? Is the material accurate and up-to-date?
- ▶ Is the writer or speaker objective?
- ▶ Does the work achieve the goal? Did the writer cover the topic adequately? Are there irrelevant materials in the work?
- ▶ Is the material relevant to the audience for whom you are writing your evaluative summary?

#### Style Evaluation:

- ▶ Is the material readable? Is it easy to follow?
- ▶ What kind of vocabulary does the writer use? Are there technical terms or jargon?