

PREPARING ABSTRACTS AND ANNOTATIONS*

WHAT IS AN ABSTRACT?

An abstract is a concise summary that conveys the essential information contained in an article, report, book, or chapter of a book. It is **not** evaluative and must not include your personal opinions. The purpose of an abstract is to give the reader sufficient information for him or her to decide whether reading the entire article or book would be worthwhile.

WHAT TYPES OF ABSTRACTS ARE TYPICALLY USED?

Two types of abstracts are typically used:

1. Descriptive Abstracts

- tell readers what information the report, article, or paper contains.
- include the purpose, methods, and scope of the report, article, or paper.
- do **not** provide results, conclusions, or recommendations.
- are always very short, usually under 100 words.
- introduce the subject to readers, who must then read the report, article, or paper to find out the author's results, conclusions, or recommendations.

2. Informative Abstracts

- communicate specific information from the report, article, or paper.
- include the purpose, methods, and scope of the report, article, or paper.
- provide the report, article, or paper's results, conclusions, and recommendations.
- are short -- from a paragraph to a page or two, depending upon the length of the original work being abstracted. Usually informative abstracts are 10% or less of the length of the original piece.
- allow readers to decide whether they want to read the report, article, or paper.

THE ABSTRACT SHOULD INCLUDE:

1. Complete bibliographic information. See STUDY GUIDE #11 (TURABIAN/ CHICAGO FORMAT), #15 (MLA FORMAT), #19 (APA FORMAT), #23 (ACS FORMAT), or #24 (CBE FORMAT).
2. A clear, concise statement of the scope and purpose of an article or book
3. A summary of the contents.
4. A statement of the conclusion or results

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD ABSTRACT

An effective abstract has the following qualities:

- uses one or more well-developed paragraphs: these are unified, coherent, concise, and able to stand alone.
- uses an introduction/body/conclusion structure which presents the article, book, paper, or report's purpose, results, conclusions, and recommendations in that order.
- follows strictly the chronology of the article, book, paper, or report.
- provides logical connections (or transitions) between the information included.
- adds **no** new information, but simply summarizes the report.
- is understandable to a wide audience.
- often uses passive verbs to downplay the author and emphasize the information. Check with your teacher if you are unsure whether or not to use passive voice.

STEPS FOR WRITING ABSTRACTS

To write an effective abstract, follow these steps:

1. Reread the article, book, paper, or report with the goal of abstracting in mind.
 - Look specifically for these main parts of the item: purpose, methods, scope, results, conclusions, and recommendation.
 - Use the chapter titles, headings, and table of contents as guides to writing the abstract.
 - If you are writing an abstract about another person's publication, the introduction and the summary are good places to begin. These areas generally cover what the article emphasizes.

2. After you have finished rereading the item, write a rough draft **without looking back** at what you are abstracting.
 - Do not merely copy key sentences: you will tend to put in too much or too little information.
 - Do not rely on the way material was phrased by the author; summarize information in a new way.
3. Revise your rough draft to
 - correct weaknesses in organization.
 - improve transitions from point to point.
 - drop unnecessary information.
 - add important information you left out.
 - eliminate wordiness.
 - fix errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
4. Print your final copy and read it again to catch possible errors or omissions.

Do not include background information, a literature review, and references to other literatures. Use concise, clear, non-repetitive, and very direct language, as demonstrated by the following example.

SAMPLE ABSTRACT

Timsit, M., and N. Bruyere-De Geyter. "The Function of Anxiety and the Structure of Personality in Sports Participation: Use of the Rorschach Test in Comparing Samples of Basketball and Football Players." *International Journal of Sport Psychology* 8.2 (1977): 128-39.
Print.

Examined the relationship between athletes and the structure of the athletic personality, and more precisely, the importance of the choice of a sport and athletics in general in the development of the personality. Forty 17-21 year olds (20 football players and 20 basketball players) were studied, and the data were compared with those from 17 technical school students of the same age. Data from the sports group were significantly different from the control group: the sports group showed freer expression, more aggression, a more evident state of anxiety, and relatively more effective control mechanisms (kinetic responses). Data for the basketballers were significantly different from those of the footballers: the basketballers had a higher tendency toward static kinetics, and the footballers had a higher anxiety index. Results are discussed in relation to the athletic capacity specifically called for in particular types of sports: Location on the court in basketball, and active and direct struggle in football.

WRITING ANNOTATIONS

WHAT IS AN ANNOTATION?

An annotation is a brief description of a book, article, or other publication. Its purpose is to characterize the publication in such a way that the reader can decide whether or not to read the work itself. It is marked by condensation, sound construction, and effective phrasing.

Annotations vary according to their intended use and their content.

1. **Descriptive Annotations**

Describe the content of a book or article and indicate distinctive features.

2. **Evaluative Annotations**

Express the usefulness of a book or article for particular situations.

3. **Combination of #1 and #2**

ELEMENTS:

1. Begin with the complete **bibliographic entry**. See STUDY GUIDE #11 (TURABIAN/ CHICAGO FORMAT), #15 (MLA FORMAT), #19 (APA FORMAT), #23 (ACS FORMAT), or #24 (CBE FORMAT).

2. **Some or all of the following should be covered in your annotation:**

- Authority and qualifications of the author, unless extremely well known. e.g. "Based on twenty years of study. William A. Smith, professor of history at XYZ University..."
- Scope and main purpose of text. Do not try to summarize the whole work. e.g. "Discusses the positive impact of Medicare on the psychiatric profession."
- Audience and level of reading difficulty. Such a comment warns readers of writings that are too elementary or scholarly for their purposes. e.g. "Swift addressed himself to the scholar, but the concluding chapters will be clear to any informed layman."
- Major bias or the position of the author in relation to his topic: "Turner gears his study more to the romantic aspects of the age than the scientific and rational developments."

- The relationship, if any, to other works in the field. e.g. "This corroborates the findings of George Brown's *Revolution*."
- Findings, results, and conclusions
- Special features, such as a bibliography, glossary, index, survey instruments, testing devices, etc.
- Summary comment. e.g. "A popular account directed at educated adults."

Not all of the points listed above need to be addressed in every annotation, but they should be kept in mind and included when appropriate.

WRITING TIPS

- Brevity and clarity are essential. Whole sentences are preferable, but simple phrases or lists are acceptable. Vary sentence length to avoid a "choppy" style.
- Avoid abbreviations.
- Do not refer unnecessarily to "the author."
- Avoid repeating the words of the title, giving the same information in different phrasing, or offering information that an intelligent person could readily infer from the title itself.
- Condense wording. For example, you may use a verb with the subject omitted when the subject is the title of the book. Convey a maximum amount of information with a minimum number of words.
- Remain objective; do not include personal prejudices unless they are those of the author.
- Annotations should not exceed 150 words.

FORMAT

Annotations should be one paragraph long and should contain a statement of the work's major thesis. The remaining sentences should support the thesis statement. You can avoid writing a paragraph that is a series of unconnected sentences summarizing separate ideas by following the order of the author's presentation of ideas, arguments, and information.

STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO ANNOTATING

The following approach to annotating will help you to use your reading time most efficiently:

1. Familiarize yourself with the contents of the book or article. Be sure to examine the table of contents, the forward, and the introduction.
2. Read as much of the work as is necessary to understand its content.
3. Outline or make notes of the information that you think should be included in the annotation.
4. Write a paragraph that covers the spirit of the work without undue emphasis on any one or more particular points.

SAMPLE ANNOTATION

Schmidt, John Z. *Causes of the Russian Revolution*. New York: Herklon, 1973. Print.

Schmidt, a Russian history professor at Yale, bases his research on documents smuggled out of the Kremlin. He reveals that a few Germans played a key role in the events leading up to the revolution. The style is heavy and somewhat argumentative, with many footnotes. Some of his conclusions are radically different from those in Mark Johnson's *Why the Red Revolution?* This book reopens questions most scholars had regarded as settled.

WRITING ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES

A bibliography is a list of writings. When published separately, and not as an appendage to a scholarly article or book, it focuses on a particular subject, period, or writer.

An annotated bibliography, which summarizes each work and indicates its usefulness and distinctive features, enables the reader to understand the particular uses of each item. The ideal annotated bibliography also indicates the relationships of one item to another.

SAMPLE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Child Study Association of America. *You, Your Child and Drugs*. New York: Child Study, 1971. Print.

This small book presents brief guidelines for parents to use in dealing with drug-related problems. It also includes some basic information about the drugs themselves and some quotations from teenagers that may provide insights. The information presented is accurate but oversimplified for many readers.

Herron, Donald M., and L. F. Anderson. *Can We Survive Drugs?* 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Chilton, 1972. Print.

The authors of this work have had a good deal of experience as law enforcement officers and have lectured frequently to law enforcement agencies, school administrators, and parents about the drug problem. This simply written book, primarily for parents, has a practical approach, telling the parent how best to cope with drug abuse among youths.

Several useful special sections have been appended, including a list of agencies, publications, and films dealing with drug abuse; a narcotics identification chart; and a glossary.

Lieberman, Florence, Phyllis Caroff, and Mary Gottesfeld. *Before Addiction: How to Help Youth.* New York: Behavioral, 1973. Print.

Written for parents, this book's purpose is to help prevent drug addiction. The authors are social workers who have had a good deal of experience with drug abusing adolescents. The book is practical and includes a broad perspective of the social environment, a critique of treatments used, and a discussion of the adolescent and his family. The first of the book's three parts deals with the problem, the second with therapy; the third is an exploration of social and philosophical issues and broader concerns.

Moses, Donald A., and Robert E. Burger. *Are You Driving Your Children to Drink? Coping with Teenage Alcohol and Drug Abuse.* New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1975. Print.

This is a "new approach" to the understanding and treatment of the drug and alcohol problems of young people, based on the concept that the psychological interaction of parents and children is at the heart of the problem. The authors attempt to get at the causes for drug use, to show how parents may have unwittingly planted the seeds of frustration and rebellion and may have "driven their children to drugs and drink."

The book is in four parts: 1) The roots--drugs and alcohol have come to middle America, but the home is where they got their start; 2) Storm warnings--what children cry out for is seldom what we listen to; 3) Healing--therapy takes many forms, but it must break a vicious circle to succeed; 4) The public problem; let's have an end to public moralizing and find a way to the understanding of individual needs.

The psychology presented in the book is good, though it is perhaps a bit simplified in order to make it suitable for the general reader.

The major proposition of the book is this: if parents are understanding of their child, yet firm in their setting of limits, if they love their child but are willing to let him grow in his individual way, can that child become a drug abuser? The answer is yes, he can, but he can also be treated far more simply and positively.

***Adapted from materials developed by Judith Kilborn and copyrighted by The Write Place, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud Minnesota. Additional sources of information include materials prepared by Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana, and the University of Toledo Libraries, Toledo, Ohio.**

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