

Accessing More Information

- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th ed. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2009.
- The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

Acknowledgments

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Where to Find Help on Campus

Consultants at the **Hamline University Writing Center**, located in the basement of Bush Library, are eager to help you with all stages of your writing. We will work with you whether you have just received an assignment and have no idea how to begin or you have a finished draft and want help with revisions.

You can make appointments online at WC Online. Simply follow the instructions at:

<http://rich37.com/hamline>

We look forward to seeing you!



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Writing Abstracts



An **abstract** is a short document—generally less than 300 words long—that concisely summarizes the subject, research methods, findings, and conclusions of a research paper. It is usually just one paragraph, and it appears at the beginning of a research paper, right after the title page.

Using Abstracts for Research

Because abstracts are concise descriptions of entire articles, they can save time when you are doing research. Abstracts will be included in the databases you search to find articles on your topic. When you find an article with an interesting title, instead of reading the whole thing, you can read the abstract in order to decide whether this article will be useful to you.

When you are beginning the research for your paper, you may choose to take advantage of the many online databases that contain just abstracts without the articles. For example, the following databases contain abstracts from a variety of fields:

- ERIC – abstracts on education
- PAIS – abstracts on public affairs
- PsycINFO – abstracts on psychology
- SocIndex – abstracts on sociology

Once you have found abstracts that appear to address your topic, then you can use other databases to find the articles themselves. If you have trouble locating the articles, ask a reference librarian for help.

All researchers use abstracts in this way. They also may submit their own abstracts to publishers in hopes of getting their articles published.

Writing Your Own Abstract

You will most likely write the abstract for your paper *after* you have written the paper itself. At that point, your thoughts about your research will be clear enough for you to write a concise summary of the main points of your paper.

You may write an abstract *before* you write your paper as a way to focus your writing. In this case, you will probably need to revise your abstract when you are finished.

Contents of an Abstract

The content of your abstract will depend on the type of paper you have written. For an empirical study, you must describe the problem you have investigated, the experimental method, the participants or subjects, and the findings and conclusions. For a review or a theoretical paper, you must summarize the topic and thesis and your sources and conclusions.

The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th ed., available in your library or in the Writing Center, offers more information on the content for abstracts of various types of papers.

A Well-Written Abstract

The APA manual recommends four characteristics of a well-written abstract.

Accurate

Your abstract must reflect the contents of your paper. It cannot contain information that you do not actually cover.

Non-evaluative

Avoid editorial language or opinionated language in the abstract. Report your findings and conclusions, but do not evaluate them. Do not comment on the body of your paper that follows.

Concise

Every word in your abstract should be meaningful and well placed. Use active voice when you can (but do not use the personal pronoun *I*). Begin your abstract with your thesis or main idea and include only the most important points of your research. Be brief.

Coherent and readable

Your abstract is your first and perhaps only opportunity to introduce readers to your ideas and your way of presenting them. Make it count.

A Sample Abstract

Note in the following abstract how verb tenses are used. The writer strives for clarity and conciseness.

Thompson, Julie M. *Mommy Queerest: Contemporary Rhetorics of Lesbian Maternal Identity*. Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2002. Print.

Mommy Queerest explores the rhetorical contestation of lesbian motherhood as an oxymoronic identity in three spheres of public discourse: judicial opinions in lesbian mother custody cases, in mainstream and lesbian/feminist journalism, and in the field of developmental psychology from 1970-2000. The book traces how metaphorical characterizations of lesbian mothers as sick, criminal, and sinful deny lesbians legitimate status as mothers. Finally, the book argues that lesbian mothers can attain rhetorical legitimacy through a critique of heterosexuality as a political regime.

Note that the author refers to her work in the present tense, and that she outlines exactly what the book will cover and the point of view it will take.