



An **Abstract** is a short (usually no longer than 200 words) self-contained summary of a longer work, usually an essay or article. It comes at the start of an article, and it serves to give readers enough information to decide whether the article is going to be worth reading for their purposes.

Similarly, a **Précis** is a shortening or summary of the text of a longer written work. It can be longer and more versatile than an abstract, sometimes including rhetorical analysis or argument. Unlike an abstract, a precis is usually separate from the work it summarizes.

### • Organizing the Abstract •

Your task in writing an abstract or précis is to make a reduction of the original with the least possible distortion. Include all the important information from each portion of the original:

1. The **background/context**.
  - o Name the **subject or topic** clearly.
2. The **problem/objective/aim** of the article.
  - o State the **hypothesis or argument** directly, including a **claim for the significance** of the study.
3. The **methods or theoretical framework**. Keep this brief—one sentence or two.
4. The most important **results or findings**. Include the most important evidence supporting your argument or answering your research question.
5. **Conclusion/discussion**.

### Keep in mind while writing an Abstract or Précis:

1. **ACCURACY**. Be sure that your summary faithfully represents the article. Choosing the wrong details can give the wrong impression—so be sure to choose the right details.
2. **KEEP IT SELF-CONTAINED**. Your abstract should be understandable by itself. Keep in mind that many readers will only read the abstract, without reading the whole article.
  - Be sure you're **summarizing**, not introducing the article. An abstract must be a self-contained miniature of the article, not an introduction.
3. **LANGUAGE**. Although you need to concentrate on essentials, avoid short, choppy sentences. An abstract should sound as scholarly and sophisticated as its original source.
  - Most abstracts are written in present tense ("This study finds") or past tense ("We interviewed subjects").
  - Stay away from the future tense ("We will study") or uncertain language ("This study *hopes* to find").
  - Avoid quotes, citations, and abbreviations in an abstract.
4. **KEY WORDS**. Include four or five key words that represent your topic and that someone might include in a search.