

How to Write an Abstract

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If you are abstracting your own writing

When abstracting your own work it may be difficult to condense a piece of writing that you agonized over for weeks (or months, or even years) into a 250-word statement. There are some tricks that you could use to make it easier, however.

Reverse outlining:

This technique is commonly used when you are having trouble organizing your own writing. The process involves writing down the one main idea that is in each paragraph on a separate piece of paper. For the purposes of writing an abstract, try grouping the main ideas of each section of the paper into a single sentence. For a scientific paper, you may have sections titled Purpose, Methods, Results, and Discussion. Each one of these sections will be longer than one paragraph, but they are grouped around a central idea. Use reverse outlining to discover the several ideas in each section and then distill them into one statement.

Cut and paste:

To create a first draft of an abstract of your own work you can read through the entire paper and cut and paste sentences that particularly capture key passages. Isolate these sentences in a separate document and work on revising these disparate sentences into a unified paragraph.

Judi's addition: If you have done your job on writing strong topic sentences, you should be able to write a first draft of an abstract just by cutting-and-pasting each of your topic sentences into a paragraph. Then revise to make sure it makes sense.