How to Write a Technical Manuscript

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Overview

- Given time constraints, will focus on two areas
  - Abstract Writing (with exercise)
  - Editing (with exercise)
An abstract is a self-contained, short, and powerful statement that describes a larger work. Components vary according to discipline. An abstract of a social science or scientific work may contain the scope, purpose, results, and contents of the work. An abstract of a humanities work may contain the thesis, background, and conclusion of the larger work. An abstract is not a review, nor does it evaluate the work being abstracted. While it contains key words found in the larger work, the abstract is an original document rather than an excerpted passage.
Writing the Abstract

• May be venue-specific

• But, most abstracts follow a particular form

• Is perhaps the single most important piece of the paper

• Needs to be polished, repeatedly!
When to Write Abstracts

• Submitting articles to journals
• Applying for research grants
• Book proposals
• PhD dissertation or masters thesis
• Conference papers
• Book chapters
• Talks
Abstract Outline

• Reason for writing
  • What is the importance of the research? Why would a reader be interested?

• Problem
  • What problem does this work attempt to solve? What is the scope of the project? What is the main argument/thesis/claim?

• Methodology
  • An abstract may include specific models or approaches used, or describe the types of evidence used in the research

• Results
  • An abstract may include specific data that indicates the results of the projects, or may discuss the findings in a more general way

• Implications
  • How does this work add to the body of knowledge on the topic?
Inside the Abstract

• All abstracts include
  • The most important information first
  • Same type and style of language in the rest of the paper
  • Key words and phrases that quickly identify the content and focus of the work
  • Clear, concise, and powerful language

• May include
  • Background information that places the work in the larger body of literature
  • The same chronological structure as the rest of the paper

• What not to do
  • Do not refer extensively to other works
  • Do not define terms
  • Do not add information that is not contained in the rest of the paper
Abstract Exercise

• See handout
Editing and Proofreading

• Get some distance from the text
• Decide what medium lets you proofread most carefully
• Do editing and proofreading in several short blocks of time
• If short on time, prioritize
Editing

• Content
  • Are the claims accurate and consistent?
  • Are all points supported by evidence?
  • Is all the information relevant to the overall goal?

• Structure
  • Appropriate intro and conclusion, with main arguments clearly stated?
  • Does each paragraph relate clearly to the main argument?
  • Logical transitions between paragraphs?
  • Topic sentences

• Clarity
  • Have you defined all important terms
  • Is the meaning of every sentence clear?
  • Is every pronoun clear?
  • Avoid words from the thesaurus that aren’t part of your normal vocabulary
Editing Cont.

• Style
  • Is the tone appropriate (formal, informal, persuasive, etc?)
  • Appropriate use of gendered language?
  • Vary the length and structure of sentences
  • Too much passive voice?
  • Do you repeat a strong word unnecessarily?
  • Does the writing contains unnecessary phrases (“there are”, “due to the fact that”, etc)?

• Citations
  • Have you appropriately cited ideas?
  • Are citations in the correct format?
Proofreading

• Don’t rely on spelling checkers
• Read slowly, and read every word
• Separate text into individual sentences
• Proofread for only one kind of error at a time
• Circle every punctuation mark
• When unsure, look it up or ask someone
Editing Exercise

• See handout