

Abstract writing

Tips for starting well
and pulling it all together

Why an abstract?

- Abstracts are a *brief* summary of your work that allows the reader to quickly understand
 - what you did
 - why you did it
 - what you found
 - *why it matters*
- Basis for accepting or rejecting presentation of your work
- Entices conference participants to attend your poster or oral presentation
- Often the **only part** of a paper or report that is read

What goes in an abstract?

- Abstract requirements for conference or journal submission are different
- Abstracts generally include:
 - Title
 - Background or introduction
 - Methods
 - Results
 - Conclusions
 - (maybe) a table or figure
 - Keywords

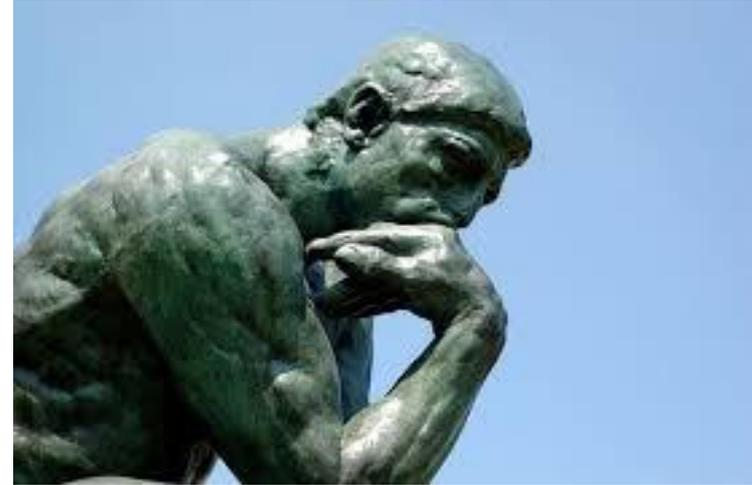
Assemble a team!

- Who are my **partners**?
- Who can help me **refine my research question**?
- Who can help me with my **analysis**?
- Who can **review** my abstract for clarity prior to submission?

Start here:

Imagine the reviewer reading the abstract.

After finishing, s/he sits back and thinks, “Ok, so what I understand from this is,...”



What is it that you want the reader to think?

What is your message?

- What is the *single main take-home message*
- Write it down – in 1 or 2 sentences only
- Make it understandable by someone not familiar with your study - without any additional background information
- Your entire abstract should build up to this message

Try it! Main message

- Write down 1 or 2 sentences that describe what you think the main message is from the hand-out abstract (Kwarisiima et al)

>

Try it! Main message

- Write down 1 or 2 sentences that describe what you think the main message is from the hand-out abstract (Kwarisiima et al)

> Although very few remained untested after 2 years of an intensive community home-based testing intervention, not testing was associated with being a middle-aged male or an adolescent female.

Why does it matter?



- *YOU* know why your study is important, but will the reader.
- *Do not assume* that the reader will understand why the work is different and important – you must *tell* the reader why it is important

Being deemed unimportant to the field or not novel is one of the top 5 reasons for rejection!

Try it! Why it matters

- Write down 1 sentence that describes why the hand-out article is important for other people in the field to know (Kwarisiima et al)

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Try it! Why it matters

- Write down 1 sentence that describes why the hand-out article is important for other people in the field to know (Kwarisiima et al)
 - > To achieve 90-90-90 targets, a high rate of HIV testing coverage will be needed. As coverage approaches 100% it is important to know who will likely continue to be missed by (refuse) HIV testing.

Choosing a conference and track

- You have the main message and why the work is important, now is the time to choose where to send the abstract
- Choose *carefully* the conference and track best suited for the message you want to convey

Submitting to the wrong category, track, or conference is one of the top 5 reasons for rejection!

Check the abstract rules

- Make note of the word limit, the section titles, and any other rules about abstract submissions
- Can/should you include a table or figure?
- Mind the conference deadlines for abstract submission—account for internal and CDC clearance timelines!

Back to the abstract,...

- Keep in mind:
 - Main message
 - Why work is important
 - Audience
 - Format & word limitations

Be concise

This is an abstract. You aren't *telling* the story, **you are *selling* it**. The details can go into your presentation once your abstract is accepted to the conference.

Methods

- Write down 1 basic sentence explaining what you did
- This should be directly connected to the main message you already have written down
- This does not have to be formatted or well-written, just get the main idea down

Try it! Methods

- Write down 1 sentence that explains what the researchers did from the hand-out abstract (Kwarisiima et al)

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Try it! Methods

- Write down 1 sentence that explains what the researchers did from the hand-out abstract (Kwarisiima et al)
- Used multivariable logistic regression to evaluate factors associated with never testing in a population cohort exposed to intensive HIV testing campaigns and followed for 2 years

Results

- Write down 1 basic sentence explaining what resulted from the work
- This should be directly connected to the main message you already have written down
- Does not have to be formatted or well-written, just get the main idea down

Use numbers

AVOID the use of quantitative statements without actual numbers to back them up:

Weak

Group B performed better than Group A



Stronger

Post-test scores were 39% higher on average in group B than group A

Integration of services led to most patients being screened for TB and referred to services



Integration of services led to 73% of patients being screened for TB and 98% of those testing positive being referred to services

Try it! Results

- Write down 1 sentence that explains what resulted from the work in the hand-out abstract (Kwarisiima et al)

>

Try it! Results

- Write down 1 sentence that explains what resulted from the work in the hand-out abstract (Kwarisiima et al)
- After 2 years, 4.4% of the population had never been tested; of these, 44% out-migrated and 3.7% died; being middle aged (25-44) and single were associated with not testing among men, while being 15-24 years and having no formal employment were associated with not testing among women.

Conclusions

- Summarize what you found
- Explain why it matters
- Make a recommendation

Try it! Conclusions

- Write down 1-2 sentences that summarize what the authors found, state their conclusions, and/or make a recommendation (why it matters). (Kwarisiima et al)

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Try it! Conclusions

- Write down 1-2 sentences that summarize what the authors found, state their conclusions, and/or make a recommendation (why it matters). (Kwarisiima et al)
 - Intensive community-based HIV testing reached almost all residents; those who were never tested tended to be middle-aged men and younger women. These groups should be targeted for testing.

Combine everything so far:

- What you did
- Why it is important
- What were your methods
- What were your results
- Why it matters

Combine everything so far: (Kwarisiima et al)

- To achieve 90-90-90 targets, a high rate of HIV testing coverage will be needed. As coverage approaches 100% it is important to know who will likely continue to be missed by (refuse) HIV testing.
- Used multivariable logistic regression to evaluate factors associated with never testing in a population cohort exposed to intensive HIV testing campaigns and followed for 2 years
- After 2 years, 4.4% of the population had never been tested; of these, 44% out-migrated and 3.7% died; being middle aged (25-44) and single were associated with not testing among men, while being 15-24 years and having no formal employment were associated with not testing among women.
- Intensive community-based HIV testing reached almost all residents; those who were never tested tended to be middle-aged men and younger women. These groups should be targeted for testing.

Add critical details

- Add a 1 or 2 sentence background or introduction as necessary to understand the context of your work
- Methods and results will probably need more details
 - location (country, province, etc), population (hospitalized patients, community members, etc), and timing (duration of work, how long ago it was performed, etc) should be added
- Add the most important information first, and build from there
- **Make sure everything added directly supports the main message**

Try it! Add critical details (Kwarisiima et al)

- Review the abstract to identify:
 - A background sentence
 - Location
 - Population
 - Timing (duration and/or how long ago)
 - Who did it

Try it! Add critical details (Kwarisiima et al)

- Review the abstract to identify:

- A background sentence
- Location
- Population
- Timing (duration and/or how long ago)
- Who did it

- Where: Kenya and Uganda
- Who: Participants in SEARCH trial which included multidisease campaigns and home-based testing, baseline census with follow-up for vital status and migration
- When: over two years
- How long ago?
- Who did it?

You now have a draft abstract:

- Introduction
 - Methods
 - Results
 - Conclusions
- All sections relate back to the main message
- No surprises
- Every line has a specific purpose

Amend the wording

- Fix the wording so that it flows well and sounds good
- Fix the grammar and spelling (this matters!)
- Change sentences to active voice

Not this (passive)

Surveys were completed by
clinicians



This (active)

Clinicians completed surveys

The Title

- Brief summary of your study
- Four common types of titles: explanatory (what you did), interrogatory (asking a question), declarative (saying what you found), catchy (humorous take on your study, puns, etc.)
- It should sell your abstract

Shorten the wording (see handout)

Consensus of opinion =

HIV Virus =

Prior to =

Unsolved problem =

Period of time =

Is essential that =

Few in number =

End result =

In close proximity =

In the event that =

Joint cooperation =

In order to =

Shorten the wording

Consensus of opinion	=	Consensus / opinion (one or the other)
HIV Virus	=	HIV (Human Immunodeficiency <i>Virus</i>)
Prior to	=	Before
Unsolved problem	=	Problem
Period of time	=	Period
Is essential that	=	Must / should
Few in number	=	Few
End result	=	Result
In close proximity	=	Close
In the event that	=	If
Joint cooperation	=	Cooperation
In order to	=	To

Shorten the wording

The study took place in the districts of X and Y. We enrolled 1,000 people from those districts, including 450 women and 550 men.

Shorten the wording

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= We enrolled 450 women and 550 men from districts X and Y.

12 words saved!

Shorten the wording

The study took place in the districts of X and Y. We enrolled 1,000 people from those districts, including 450 women and 550 men.

= We enrolled 450 women and 550 men from districts X and Y.
12 words saved!

In the end, intervention A performed better than intervention B. Participants enrolled in intervention A showed a 30% improvement after 1 week, and maintained a 24% improvement after 12 weeks. In comparison, participants in intervention B showed a 18% improvement after 1 week, and only 9% improvement after 12 weeks.

Shorten the wording

The study took place in the districts of X and Y. We enrolled 1,000 people from those districts, including 450 women and 550 men.

= We enrolled 450 women and 550 men from districts X and Y.
12 words saved!

In the end, intervention A performed better than intervention B. Participants enrolled in intervention A showed a 30% improvement after 1 week, and maintained a 24% improvement after 12 weeks. In comparison, participants in intervention B showed a 18% improvement after 1 week, and only 9% improvement after 12 weeks.

= After 1 week participants in intervention A improved 30% while those in B improved 18%; 12 week retention was 24% and 9% , respectively.

28 words saved!

Review your work

- Punctuation and spacing?
- Appropriate capitalization?
- Spelling and definition of acronyms?
- Appropriate or inconsistent verb tense?
- Good use of 1st or 3rd person?
- Good use of active and passive voice?

Presenting quantitative results

- There are many acceptable ways to express quantitative findings:
 - 3.4% (95% confidence interval [CI]: 1.2—4.8) ← spell out at first use and nested parens/brackets
 - 3.4% (95%CI: 1.2, 4.8%) ← comma instead of double-dash
 - 3.4% (95% CI: 1.2—4.8%) ← space between 95% and CI is easier to read but creates extra word
 - 3.4% (95% CI 1.2—4.8) ← you can drop the % on the end if you like

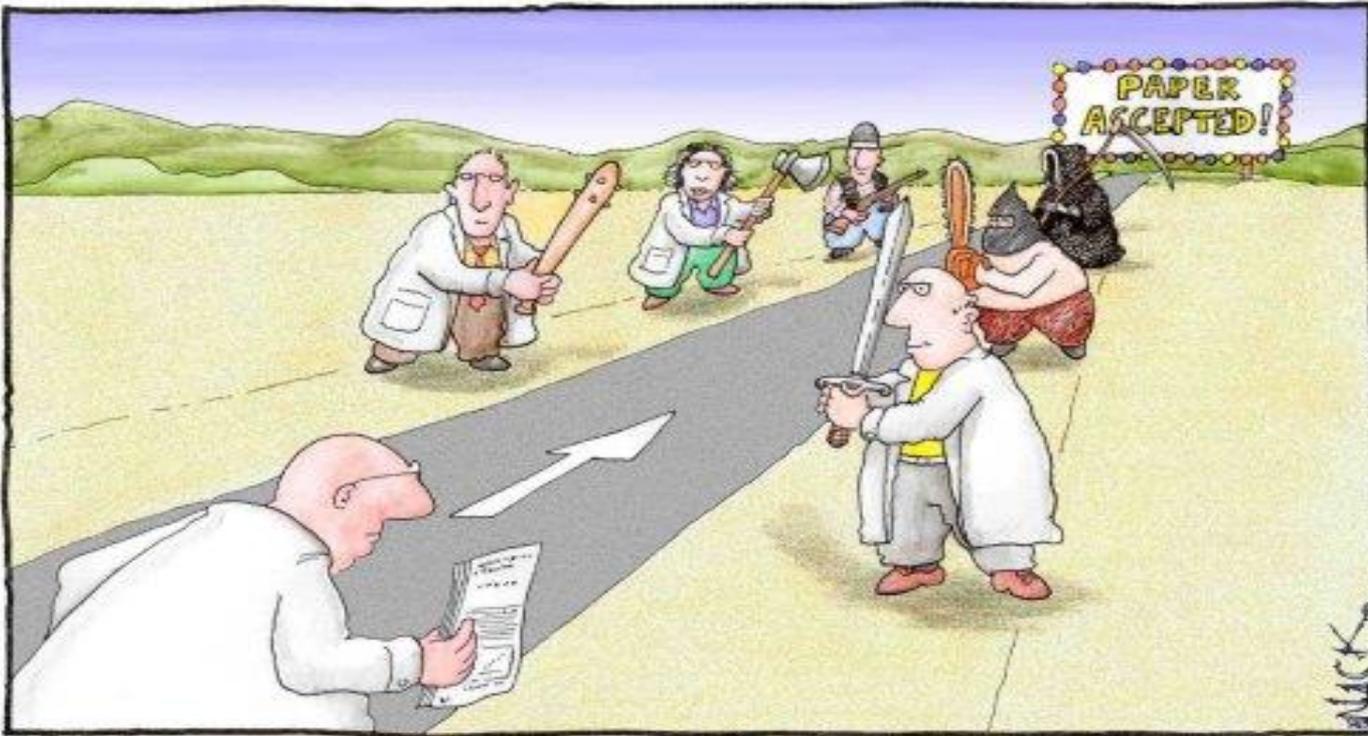
Presenting quantitative results

- Avoid the following:
 - 3.4% (CI 1.2—4.8) ← you need the width of the interval (95%)
 - 3.4% (1.2—4.8) ← you need to say what it is (confidence interval)
 - 3.4% (1.2, 4.8) ← inappropriate spaces
 - 3.4%(95%CI 1.2,4.8) ← lack of appropriate space after %

Bring it all together:

1. Is the abstract under the word limit and in compliance with other formatting rules?
2. Does this abstract answer what was done, where, when, and *why*?
3. Is it clear why this work matters, why conference attendees should care?
4. Is it clear what is new and important about this work?
5. Do the sections follow from each other and support the main message?
6. Is the *strength* of the methods and results clear?
7. Do the conclusions follow directly and logically from the results?
8. Did I follow the conference guidelines exactly?

Ask for internal review



Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as 'quite an improvement.'

Ask for internal review

- Goal of the internal reviewer is:
 - To help you avoid suffering down the line
 - Make you successful
 - Get your abstract accepted
- Ask one or more persons to do a technical review
- Ask someone to do an editorial review

Thank you!