
Abstract Writing

Kris Greiner

Editor, Design Center

Before you start writing

- Read other abstracts to get a feel for structure, flow, wording, etc.
- **Check the instructions**
 - Structured or unstructured
 - Section headings should match exactly what instructions state (if they aren't embedded in the form)
 - “Introduction” vs. “Background”
- Check word/character count before you go online
 - Total character count includes spaces, numerals, punctuation
 - Don't worry about counts until you're ready to do final revision
- Tables, figures if allowed
 - Great for reducing word count
 - Be sure to check format and upload requirements

Research Abstracts

Introduction/Background

Materials, Methods

Results, Discussion

Conclusion(s)

Title

Author, Author, Author

[Abstract content lines]

[Abstract content lines]

[Abstract content lines]

[Abstract content lines]

Title Author, Author, Author	

Create a title

- Be concise: title may count toward overall word/character count
- Use active voice and get to the point
 - Role of Interferon-gamma in Cardiac Metabolic Rewiring
 - vs.
 - Interferon-gamma Signaling Drives Cardiac Metabolic Rewiring
- Case report titles:
 - Be thoughtful when using catchy/clever titles; be respectful of the patient/circumstances
 - Example: “Lucky Catch: Fishhook Injury of the Tongue”
 - Patient was a 13-month-old

Authors, disclosures, etc.

- Have all of this info ready before you log in to submit
- Names and degrees
 - Double-check preferred names and degrees with all authors
 - Make sure all names are spelled correctly!
- Affiliations
 - Generally use “University of Iowa,” or “University of Iowa Health Care”
 - Use proper/official names for all affiliations
 - Iowa City VA is VA Iowa City Health Care
 - “Hem-Onc” is Division of Hematology, Oncology, and Blood & Marrow Transplantation
- Ask coauthors for disclosures, COIs, funding relevant to the work

Getting started

- Start drafting even if waiting for results, data
- Write what you already know with the data/info you have
 - The problem/question that was addressed: Background/Introduction, or the patient's presentation
 - The goal in seeking a solution to the problem or answering the question: Aim
 - What did you do? Methods
 - What did you figure out? Results
 - Why are your findings important? Conclusions

Getting started

- Notes, incomplete sentences, thoughts are great for first draft
- Do you have data that can be shown in a table or graph?
- Use active voice when possible
 - Passive: “A strong correlation was found between ...”
 - Active: “We found a strong correlation between ...”
- Be objective and a bit humble
 - Cautiously report “firsts”: “To our knowledge...”
 - Don’t state significance unless statistically accurate
 - Report limitations

Background/Introduction

- Shortest part of the abstract
- Assume readers have a general knowledge of the broader subject
- Examples:
 - Too broad: “Rheumatoid arthritis is a multisystem inflammatory disease affecting 18 million people...”
 - Specific: “Rheumatoid lung nodules are the most common pulmonary manifestation of rheumatoid arthritis (RA).”
- Don’t overexplain: save details for the presentation/poster and full manuscript
- Aim(s)/Hypothesis: if required, use only one sentence for each aim; 1-2 concise sentences for a hypothesis

Materials, Methods, Case Description

- Use broader language to explain methods, data sets, analyses; clinical workups (labs, imaging, H&P)
- Describe study or case chronologically: this takes you and the reader through events/processes logically
- Case reports
 - Include details *pertinent* to diagnosis or problem
 - Patient outcome at time of writing/last follow-up; images can be helpful*
 - *Obtain patient consent, even when deidentifying; consent form available at <https://designcenter.uiowa.edu/editing-services/manuscript-writing-and-formatting> (or email Kris)

Results

- Generally the longest section of an abstract
- Start this section with *main* findings, then highlight/emphasize specifics
- Figures or graphs can summarize results

Discussion

- If no Discussion section in abstract template:
 - Interpret findings at the end of the Results section
- Describe how/why results are useful or important
- Case reports:
 - How does this single patient (or small series) help other clinicians?
 - What is the teaching point?

Conclusions

- Summarize in one or two sentences the take-away point(s)
- Don't repeat data or further interpret findings
- Implications/lessons for future study: "where do we go from here?"

Refining

- Title can include abbreviations, but check whether this is allowed, and define all
- If a table or graph is used, be sure data is not duplicated in text
- If a photo is included, be sure it's fully deidentified and labeled as needed; include a legend/caption
- Edit for fewer words, even if the abstract is within the word or character count limit
 - Helps reviewers focus
 - Makes a more concise abstract

Examples of word reduction

- “In order to elucidate...” → “We investigated/reviewed...”
- ~~“It was determined that”~~ ~~“We found that”~~ ~~“Our results indicate”~~
- Use articles sparingly (the, a, an)
 - ~~“The American Heart Association guidelines state...”~~
- Don’t use “that”
 - “We found ~~that~~ cells overexpressing....”
- Don’t use transitions: “however,” “moreover,” “thus”
 - Use a semi-colon instead

Examples

- Numerals must be spelled out at the start of a sentence (usually); otherwise use numerals even under 10
- Delete spaces between numerals and symbols
 - $N = 73 \longrightarrow N=73$
 - $p \leq 0.05 \longrightarrow p\leq 0.05$

When you think it's done

- Proofread
- Ask senior author to read
- Read it again
- Ask someone else to read it
- 😊 Ask your editor to review it: kristina-greiner@uiowa.edu