ABSTRACTS

What are they?
An abstract is a fully self-contained, “in a nutshell” description of your paper. Think about what you would write if you had to cram all of your paper’s argument into a single paragraph—that’s essentially what an abstract is. The abstract is a common part of APA papers specifically, where it is found on its own page immediately following the title page.

The content and structure of your abstract will depend on the work being discussed in it. An abstract of a scientific research paper will contain elements not found in an abstract of a literature article, and vice versa. Although it’s therefore difficult to make sweeping statements about what should or should not be included in any given abstract, try including the following pieces of information, whenever applicable, to keep you on the right track:

1) **Purpose:**
   This section indicates what your paper seeks to accomplish. The purpose statement is different from the thesis statement in that it does not give your specific argument, but rather shows what you hope to accomplish by making that argument.

2) **Context:**
   This section BRIEFLY indicates how your argument/research will extend, contradict, or move beyond the conversations other scholars/researchers are already having on your topic. Be careful not to refer extensively to those other scholars/researchers, though—that’s what your essay is for.

3) **Thesis/Problem statement:**
   This section introduces the specific subject/argument that your paper will focus on. Sometimes that means giving a “problem statement” where you identify a specific problem that you’re aiming to solve or investigate. Other times, that means presenting a thesis statement that can usually be taken word-for-word from your intro paragraph.

4) **Methods:**
   This is a section that should only be included if the paper you’ve written describes a study that you yourself have performed. In that case, the method section simply lists the steps you took to conduct your study.

5) **Results/Conclusions:**
   This sections tells what results you gleaned from your study and/or what conclusions you drew from your research. In this section, it is especially important to avoid vague, hand-waving words such as "very,” "small,” or "significant." Instead, be as specific as possible.

6) **Implications:**
   This section indicates what impact your paper might have in your field. For example, is it going to change the world (unlikely), be a significant “win,” or simply serve as a road sign indicating that this path is a promising one (or a waste of time)? In essence, it explains why your readers should care about the problem/topic of your paper.
**Final tips:**

- Be sure to read your assignment sheet very carefully, as it may indicate which of these “parts” of an abstract your professor wants you to include, and which ones you can leave out.

- Although a typical abstract is around 150-250 words, be sure follow your professor’s individual guidelines to make sure your word count is on target.

- When in doubt, it’s often a good idea to model your abstract on examples from your discipline. Find examples of abstracts from your particular field in a library database and mimic what they do.

- Be careful not to use too much obscure jargon in the abstract. Any complex terms you do have to use, however, do not need to be defined—that’s what your full paper is for!

- Each of the recommended sections on the opposite side of this handout typically only need 1-3 sentences to fully complete. Brevity is key!

- There is always room for creativity. In particular, the recommended sections may be merged together if desired, meaning that you could potentially indicate your “purpose” and your “thesis” in a single sentence. The order of those sections could also be adjusted as needed.

**Example:** In the following example, each sentence is numbered to correspond with one of the 6 recommended sections described on the reverse side of this handout. Section number 4 is missing here, as this paper had no “methods” to present.

1 This paper calls attention to what has been previously overlooked as a significant form of learning in public schools, specifically detailing how even a sport video game can provide valuable educational experiences. 2 Although many scholars have recently been focusing on the negative impacts of sports video games, 3 this paper argues, alternatively, that such games improve students’ problem solving skills, inspire interest in history and culture, and encourage independent questioning that helps develop the mindset of a life-long learner. 5 When teachers are able to capitalize on these benefits, students are in turn able to engage more fully in their own educational processes and thereby learn more effectively. 6 This outcome suggests that a shift in focus may be necessary in educational research, moving away from person to person interactions and focusing instead on person to screen interactions.