

Writing abstracts

An abstract is a short statement that describes a much longer piece of writing or a prospective conference presentation. Abstracts for research papers or theses should provide the reader with a quick overview of the entire study. Abstracts written for PhDs typically contain the following elements:

- Importance of the topic
and/or
- Reference to the current literature
and/or
Identification of a knowledge gap

- **Aim(s) of the current study**

- Indication of the methods used

- **Statement of the key finding(s)**

- Implications of the findings
- *and/or*
Value of the current study

The first three elements are grouped together because, although they may substitute each other, it is possible to find all three together. However, it is also possible to find PhD abstracts where none of them are present. Of all the elements listed above, only the 'aims of the current study' and the 'statement of key findings' appear to be obligatory and so these appear here in bold. Note that all except the last two may also be found in the introductory section of a research paper. The last two are normally found in the discussion and conclusion sections. Phrases associated with all these elements are listed below.

Highlighting the importance of topic

X is vital for ...

X plays a key role in ...

X is a classic problem in ...

Xs were a major element of ...

There is a recognised need for ...

X is a condition that is characterized by ...

X is a pathogenic bacterium that causes ...

Recently, there has been renewed interest in ...

Since the 1960s, gradual changes in X have been observed.

The X industry is estimated to be worth over \$300 billion annually.

Reference to current literature

Several studies have documented ...
Studies of X show the importance of ...
Several attempts have been made to ...
A growing body of evidence suggests ...
X is becoming a common trend in Y research.
Recent studies related to X have shown that ...
X has been the focus of much investigation in the search for ...
X has emerged as a powerful tool in studying the behaviour of ...
There has been substantial research undertaken on the role of ...
Previous research has indicated potential associations between ...
X has attracted considerable attention, both scholarly and popular.

Identification of a knowledge gap

However, X have yet to be understood.
Previous studies of X have not dealt with ...
Researchers have not treated X in much detail.
The historiography of X largely ignores the role of Y.
Most studies in the field of X have only focused on ...
The contribution of X has received little attention within ...
For the past three decades, studies of X have been restricted to ...
The cellular mechanisms underlying those defects are still poorly understood.
No known empirical research has focused on exploring relationships between ...
This research has been impeded by the lack of appropriate attachment measures.

Aim of the current study

The aim of this study was to ...
This study set out to examine ...
This study set out to determine whether ...
The principal objective of this project was to investigate ...
In this study, techniques for X were developed and applied to ...
The present study aimed to explore the relationship between ...

This thesis examines the roles played by ...
This thesis explores the degree to which ...
This thesis addresses a neglected aspect of ...
This thesis explores the chronology and geography of ...
This thesis aims to portray the different ways in which ...
This thesis seeks to understand and explain the role of ...

Indication of methods used

The research is based on four case studies
Contemporary source material was used to examine ...
This study provides a novel approach to quantifying X using ...
This study used a phenomenographic approach to identify the ...
An online survey provided quantitative data from 670 participants.
Questionnaire assessments of X were collected from 116 adults who ...
The study utilised a comparison control group design with three groups of ...
The research consisted of an extensive ethnographic enquiry that included ...
A combined qualitative and quantitative methodological approach was used to ...
A cross-sectional study was undertaken to explore the potential relationship between ...

Statement of key findings

Results showed that ...
This study identified ...
The findings show that ...
Respondents reported ...
The thesis concludes that ...
Analysis of X revealed that ...
The experimental data suggested that ...
Evidence is presented which shows that ...
The research presented here confirms that ...
The study identified limited evidence of the ...
The principal findings of this research are that ...
In this study, X was shown to vary in response to ...
This review found evidence that early interventions are effective in ...
The findings indicated that there was a positive relationship between ...
Significant associations for X were identified for ten variables, including ...

Implications and/or the value of the current study

The study implies that ...
The involvement of X implies that ...
It is evidently clear from the findings that ...
An implication of this is the possibility that ...
The results of this study support the view that ...
These findings provide a solid evidence based for ...
The present results highlight the detrimental effects that X has on ...

These data support further clinical development of ...
The findings can contribute to a better understanding of ...
This research provides a timely and necessary study of the ...
The findings presented in this thesis add to our understanding of ...
The research results represent a further step towards developing ...
This study should, therefore, be of value to practitioners wishing to ...
As a result of these investigations, suggestions were identified for future research