

Academic Writing

Lesson 8
Titles, keywords, and abstracts

Titles

- Usually, a paper or piece of research has a **working title** while in progress.
- A working title is necessary because:
 - A project needs to have a name so that the author(s) can refer to it.
 - A title is necessary when applying for grants and funding
 - It helps to keep the work focused

Titles

- The same research project may produce several papers with similar titles.
 - A paper's **definitive title** is decided when that paper is completed and sent for publication or inclusion in a conference.
- Titles come in a variety of formats depending on the academic discipline and the type of work
monograph, thesis, journal article/book chapter, WIP report, squib, book review, etc.

Titles

- A good title is **concise** and **information-rich**, and should:
 - Indicate the focus and scope accurately;
 - Use current terminology and keywords (to facilitate retrieval in indexes, abstracts, etc.);
 - (Especially for conferences) Attract the attention and interest of the reader;

Titles

TASK 1

- Look at the references from an article on Singapore English (Wong 2004).
 - Which of the titles do you think are too long? Why?
 - And which are too short? Why?
 - Do you notice any other features in the structure and wording of these linguistics titles?

Abstracts

- Abstracts are short research summaries.
 - A **journal article/book/thesis abstract** allows readers to decide whether the complete work is worth reading;
 - **Conference programme abstracts** help delegates decide which presentations to attend;
 - **Abstracts for proposals for papers** are the basis for acceptance/rejection of a full-length contribution or poster;
 - **Extended abstracts** help a conference audience to engage with a detailed presentation.

Abstracts

- An abstract follows the organisation of the text/presentation that it summarises:
 - (i) introduction or thesis statement;
 - (ii) background;
 - (iii) data and methodology;
 - (iv) discussion;
 - (v) conclusions, implications, future research.
- It is followed by keywords, and bibliographic references where relevant.

Types of abstracts

TASK 2

- Identifying the parts of an abstract
 - Read the abstracts (from journal articles) and tick the features which you can find in each.
 - **No abstract** will have **all** the features.

Types of abstracts

- The types of abstracts to be examined here (in order of increasing length) are:
 - Conference programme abstracts
 - These are also useful for writing **blurbs** for **events**
 - Research paper/presentation abstract
 - These are useful for your thesis
 - Extended abstract
 - These help you organise your ideas; you can use them as a first draft for a longer piece of work

Types of abstracts

- The principal function of a **conference programme abstract** is to attract the interest of the potential audience. It is usually 50-60 words long (short!) and includes:
 - A general statement including essential background information;
 - A description of the project;
 - Outline of the methods used;
 - Most important/interesting findings;
 - Implications/ points for debate and discussion

Types of abstracts

- A **research paper abstract** = 150-250 words, in paragraphs. It usually includes
 - A brief discussion of context or background;
 - Objectives of the study/ research question;
 - Subtopics explored +argument/ stance taken;
 - Reference to source material and methodology
 - library research?
 - analysis of fictional texts?
 - interviews or observations?
 - Main conclusions (or hypothesized conclusions).
 - The implications or significance of the findings.

Types of abstracts

- An extended abstract is 1000-1500 words in length. It can feature notes, figures and tables. It normally includes:
 - An introduction stating the relevant background and the hypothesis under consideration
 - A **methods section** introducing the data examined and the methodology employed
 - A **results section** stating the findings
 - A **conclusion section** which summarises the major results and presents the implications.

Writing abstracts

TASK 3

- Write an abstract for an oral presentation
 - Follow the schema and write a draft version of your abstract.
 - The resulting text will almost certainly be too long for the 150 word limit
 - Follow the tips for cutting down “wordiness”, until your text is 150 words long (or less).
 - Add references (where appropriate)
 - Add up to 5 key words

Key words

- Key words “unlock” (or reveal) the content of an article/book.
 - They are inserted into indexing systems to facilitate the retrieval of your work
 - A “key word” may consist of more than one word (i.e. a compound noun)
- For maximum impact, use as many of your keywords as possible in your title
 - This makes it even more likely that others will find your work, esp. via *Google scholar*, etc.

Title, abstract, keyword

- Look at the example to see how the keywords relate to (and are repeated in):
 - the title;
 - the 50-word summary (conference programme abstract);
 - The 300-word abstract (conference proposal abstract)
 - And (if you can bear it) in the full (5000-word) paper
 - http://ucl.ac.uk/publications/CL2007/paper/170_Paper.pdf