QC Writing Center Abstract Guide

What is an abstract?
An abstract is a 150- to 250-word paragraph that provides readers with a quick overview of your essay or report and its organization. It should express your thesis (or central idea) and your key points; it should also suggest any implications or applications of the research you discuss in the paper. In other words, it is a concise summary of the entire paper.

- The function of an abstract is to *describe*, not to evaluate or defend, the paper
- The abstract should begin with a brief but precise statement of the problem or issue, followed by a description of the research method and design, the major findings, and the conclusions reached.
- The abstract should contain the most important keywords referring to method and content: these facilitate access to the abstract by computer search and enable a reader to decide whether to read the entire dissertation.

Note: Your abstract should read like an overview of your paper, not a proposal for what you intended to study or accomplish. Avoid beginning your sentences with phrases like, “This essay will examine...” or “In this research paper I will attempt to prove...”

A bad abstract looks like this:
This paper will look at the human genome project and its goals. I will prove that scientists have ethical and moral questions about genetic engineering because of this project.

A good abstract looks like this:
Begun in 1988, the human genome project intends to map the 23 chromosomes that provide the blueprint for the human species. The project has both scientific and ethical goals. The scientific goals underscore the advantages of the genome project, including identifying and curing diseases and enabling people to select the traits of their offspring, among other opportunities. Ethically, however, the project raises serious questions about the morality of genetic engineering. To handle both the medical opportunities and ethical dilemmas posed by the genome project, scientists need to develop a clear set of principles for genetic engineering and to continue educating the public about the genome project.

For more information about paper abstracts, please visit the QC Writing Center worksheets and look at our APA guide.

Taken from: [https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides-writing-an-abstract](https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides-writing-an-abstract)