Figure 10.5 Abstract Cartoon by Hilda Bastian; licensed CC BY-NC-ND

An abstract is a summary statement of a piece of writing (e.g., journal article, book chapter, book, conference paper) - it provides a snapshot of the output. Unlike abstract art, a written abstract is not abstract at all, but is very specific.

Basic structure of an abstract:

- Background
- Purpose/aim
- Problem
- Methodology
- Methods
- Results
- Conclusion

Be aware that there will be disciplinary differences and also different requirements for different journals.

The structure of the abstract moves from a broad topic to specific/basic details of the paper and then out to the broader significance of the study, much like this hourglass figure:

Broad topic

- Background
- Purpose/aim
- Problem

Specific/basic details

- Methodology, methods
- Participants, context of the study
- Results, research findings

Broader significance

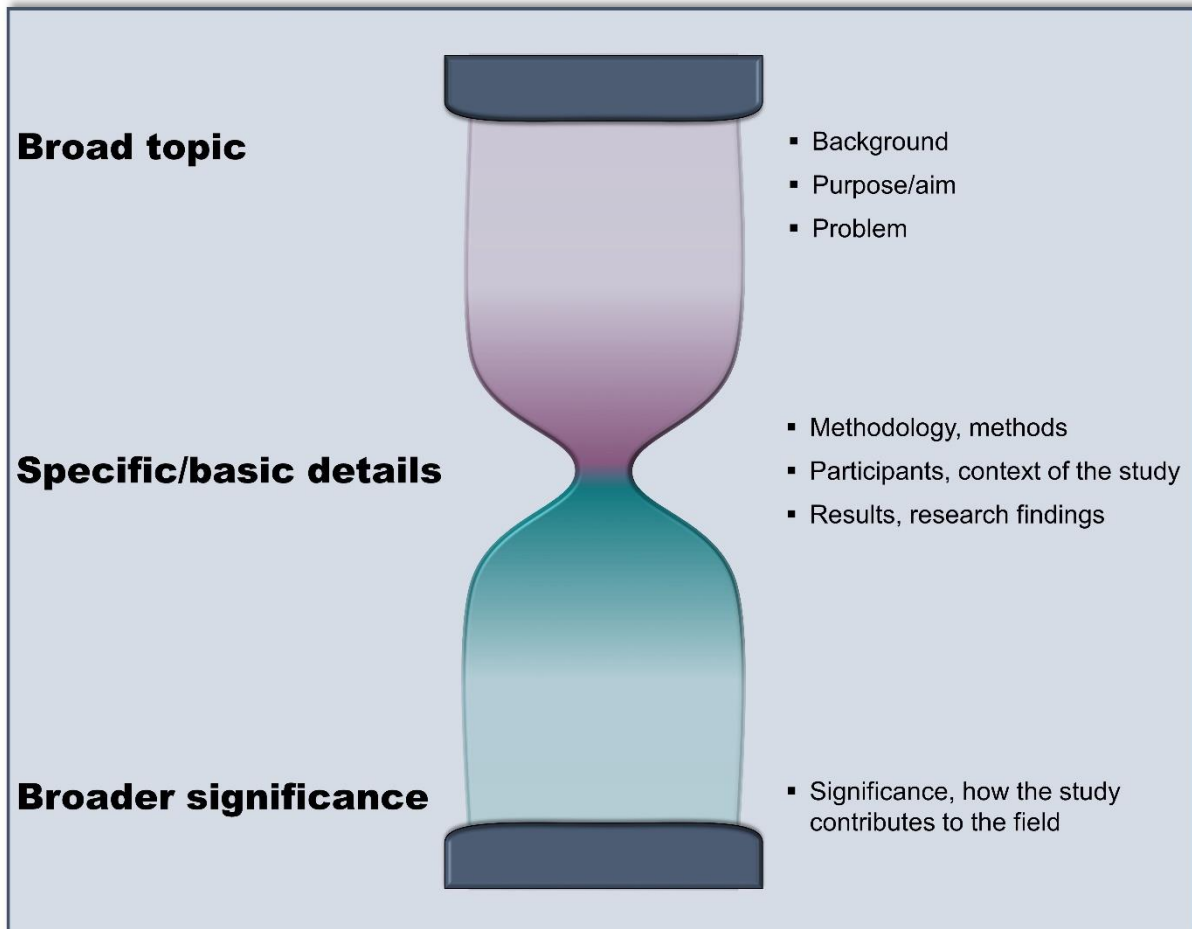- Significance, how the study contributes to the field

Figure 10.6 Image of an Abstract as an hourglass structure

Writing an abstract

What is an abstract? An **abstract** is a short, non-evaluative, information-dense summary of the contents and purpose of a paper. This summary must be able to stand alone since it may be the only part of the work a reader sees. You may be asked to write an abstract as part of your assignment. Although your abstract is placed in the first section of your assignment, it is best written last. Follow this academic style and format:

1. Format
2. Read an example
3. Follow the steps

> **NOTE:** Citation style APA 7th Edition. Modify for other citation styles.

1. Format

- Place the abstract on its own page immediately after the title page and before your paper
- Use the heading **Abstract –** centred, top of the page, **title case**[1]
- Write a SINGLE paragraph
- Left align with no indent
- Double spaced your text
- Write less than 250 words, depending on the length of the work which follows (no more than than 10% of the total word count of the work)
- Use a clear, direct writing style that employs short sentences and key words and phrases that quickly identify the content and focus of the work.

2. Read an example

Abstract

This study examined the opinions of influential, authoritative employees from the education and legal systems, regarding their perceptions of the role of the law and cyberbullying in Australian schools. Participants were asked whether they thought a specific law for cyberbullying should be introduced, what particular behaviours, if any, should be criminalised and who should be involved. Participants were located across three Australian States. Thematic analysis was used to identify eight main themes within the data, namely (1) uses of the law in general, (2) introduction of a law for cyberbullying, (3) benefits and difficulties of criminalising cyberbullying for young people, (4) conditions for a cyberbullying law for young people, (5) who should be involved in a cyberbullying law, (6) legal sanctions thought to be appropriate, (7) educational and legal solutions and (8) educational interventions for student cyberbullying. Implications include increasing the awareness of how existing legislative responses can be used as deterrents, when working towards more effective cooperation of education and legal systems.

Acknowledgement of sample abstract (not required as you are the writer)

Young, H., Campbell, M., Spears, B., Butler, D., Cross, D., & Slee, P. (2016). Cyberbullying and the role of the law in Australian Schools. *Australian Council for Education research, 60*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/000494411562755

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[1] **Title case**

The first word and first word after a colon, and all MAJOR WORDS are capitalised. Use lower case for words of less than 3 letters EXCEPT after a colon. Use title case for titles of journals, magazines and newspapers.

3. Follow the steps

Analysis of example

Abstract

1. state the problem

This study examined the opinions of influential, authoritative employees from the education and legal systems, regarding their perceptions of the role of the law and cyberbullying in Australian schools.

2. say why it is under investigation

Participants were asked whether they thought a specific law for cyberbullying should be introduced, what particular behaviours, if any, should be criminalised and who should be involved

3. describe participants and their characteristics

Participants were located across three Australian States.

4. give a brief overview of what was done

Thematic analysis was used to identify eight main themes within the data, namely (1) uses of the law in general, (2) introduction of a law for cyberbullying, (3) benefits and difficulties of criminalising cyberbullying for young people, (4) conditions for a cyberbullying law for young people, (5) who should be involved in a cyberbullying law, (6) legal sanctions thought to be appropriate, (7) educational and legal solutions and (8) educational interventions for student cyberbullying.

5. discuss the main result/findings and consider what the result indicates

Implications include increasing the awareness of how existing legislative responses can be used as deterrents, when working towards more effective cooperation of education and legal systems.

CAN ABSTRACTS BE A REFERENCE SOURCE?

EXTRA

- It is preferable that you locate and cite the article itself.
- An abstract can be cited **if** that is your only available source.
- The reference is the same as for a journal article. Cite the author and date in-text. Place the descriptor [Abstract] after the title.
- If you did not locate the article itself, place Abstract retrieved from URL

Example

In-text: Young et al. (2016)

References

Young, H., Campbell, M., Spears, B., Butler, D., Cross, D., & Slee, P. (2016). Cyberbullying and the application of law in Australian schools [Abstract]. *Australian Journal for Educational Research*, *60*(1). Abstract retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/000494411152755

Abstract structure - Examples

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Below are examples of abstracts. Read each example and note the different sections highlighted:

- ☐ Broad topic (i.e. background, purpose/aim, problem)
- ☐ Specific/basic details (i.e. methodology, context of the study, results and research findings)
- ☐ Broader significance (i.e. how the study contributes to the field)

Example 1

Background

E-cigarettes are commonly used in attempts to stop smoking, **but** evidence is limited regarding their effectiveness as compared with that of nicotine products approved as smoking-cessation treatments.

Methods

We randomly assigned adults attending U.K. National Health Service stop-smoking services to either nicotine-replacement products of their choice, including product combinations, provided for up to 3 months, or an e-cigarette starter pack (a second-generation refillable e-cigarette with one bottle of nicotine e-liquid [18 mg per milliliter]), with a recommendation to purchase further e-liquids of the flavor and strength of their choice. Treatment included weekly behavioral support for at least 4 weeks. The primary outcome was sustained abstinence for 1 year, which was validated biochemically at the final visit. Participants who were lost to follow-up or did not provide biochemical validation were considered to not be abstinent. Secondary outcomes included participant-reported treatment usage and respiratory symptoms.

Results

A total of 886 participants underwent randomization. The 1-year abstinence rate was 18.0% in the e-cigarette group, as compared with 9.9% in the nicotine-replacement group (relative risk, 1.83; 95% confidence interval [CI], 1.30 to 2.58; P<0.001). Among participants with 1-year abstinence, those in the e-cigarette group were more likely than those in the nicotine-replacement group to use their assigned product at 52 weeks (80% [63 of 79 participants] vs. 9% [4 of 44 participants]). Overall, throat or mouth irritation was reported more frequently in the e-cigarette group (65.3%, vs. 51.2% in the nicotine-replacement group) and nausea more frequently in the nicotine-replacement group (37.9%, vs. 31.3% in the e-cigarette group). The e-cigarette group reported greater declines in the incidence of cough and phlegm production from baseline to 52 weeks than did the nicotine-replacement group (relative risk for cough, 0.8; 95% CI, 0.6 to 0.9; relative risk for phlegm, 0.7; 95% CI, 0.6 to 0.9). There were no significant between-group differences in the incidence of wheezing or shortness of breath.

Conclusions

E-cigarettes were more effective for smoking cessation than nicotine-replacement therapy, when both products were accompanied by behavioral support. (Funded by the National Institute for Health Research and Cancer Research UK; Current Controlled Trials number, ISRCTN60477608. opens in new tab.) (353 words)

Hajek et al. (2019). A randomized trial of e-cigarettes versus nicotine-replacement therapy. *New England Journal of Medicine, 380,* 629-637.

Example 2

Civic honesty is essential to social capital and economic development **but** is often in conflict with material self-interest. We examine the trade-off between honesty and self-interest using field experiments in 355 cities spanning 40 countries around the globe. In these experiments, we turned in more than 17,000 lost wallets containing varying amounts of money at public and private institutions and measured whether recipients contacted the owners to return the wallets. In virtually all countries, citizens were more likely to return wallets that contained more money. Neither nonexperts nor professional economists were able to predict this result. Additional data suggest that our main findings can be explained by a combination of altruistic concerns and an aversion to viewing oneself as a thief, both of which increase with the material benefits of dishonesty. (131 words)

Cohn, A. et al. (2019). Civic honesty around the globe. *Science, 365,* 70-73.