Writing the Abstract for Your Graduate Capstone Thesis at AMU/APU

Video 1: What is an Abstract?

Hello, and welcome to Writing the Abstract for Your Graduate Capstone Thesis. This is the first of a 3-part series, the purpose of which is to provide guidance on how to write an abstract for your APUS Master’s Thesis or Capstone paper. In this first video we will cover

- What an abstract is,
- Why it is important, and
- What information you must include in the abstract.

In the second video we will review how to write a good abstract.

And in the third and final video, we will look at two sample abstracts -- one well-written and one that is not well written -- and review how to revise and edit your abstract correctly.

What is an abstract? An abstract is a written synopsis or summary of a research article, a graduate thesis, a review or report, a conference proceeding, or any other in-depth discussion on a specific topic or idea.

An abstract is typically located at the beginning of the document and acts as an introduction to that document. It provides researchers with a quick summary of the basic content, in this case, of your thesis. It should stand on its own as a piece of writing. That is, although brief, the abstract should be an accurate and complete report of the original document.

Why is an abstract important? An abstract is an essential part of your thesis or capstone paper. Briefly, an abstract lets the reader learn more about your research. But abstracts are important for a number of reasons.

First, abstracts save time by providing researchers with a quick overview of a document’s contents. Because abstracts are composed of sentences, researchers are shown more detailed information than they would get from the short tags or search terms used to find or describe a paper or just from the title alone. By reading the abstract, the reader knows the main points of the author. He or she can then decide if the document is significant for their own information need and whether or not they want to read the full text document.

Second, abstracts serve as aids for researchers who are conducting literature searches. As you’ll recall when you did the literature search for your study, gathering information about a topic can be a complicated process. Abstracts facilitate the process by letting researchers

- select relevant documents from lists or a collection of documents on a given topic;
- save time, by informing users of a document’s content before actual retrieval or downloading; and
- arrange their research project files (as abstracts are more easily handled than full-text documents).
Third, abstracts serve to aid in the commercial information retrieval process. Typically, when a document is published or saved in a collection, search terms or tags are added to the file in order to make it accessible to users. This process is called indexing. Often, the words used for indexing are drawn from the abstract. Abstracts are also used to categorize the full document according to its general subject area. This is why it is very important for your abstract to be accurate, correct, and complete.

What information must be included in the abstract? The abstract is a required component to your thesis or capstone paper. You will find the format for the abstract in the End of Program Assessment Manual for Graduate Studies (EOP Manual). Your abstract must contain the following:

- purpose of the research,
- methodology,
- findings, and
- conclusion

The purpose of the research statement identifies the stated objective or focus of your investigation. This sentence answers the question, “What research problem was addressed and why?”

The methodology statement identifies the research method or methods you used when you did your study. This sentence explains what was done to try to answer the research question or problem. It is a brief description of how you decided to approach the problem. If you used a specific theoretical approach, it gets included here as well.

The findings statement reports the results of your research. Here you tell your reader the crucial results of your investigation and only those that are necessary to answer your original research question or problem. Findings are stated briefly and are not explained; they are simply reported.

The conclusion statement expresses the implications or importance of your study. This sentence informs the reader why the study was interesting, valuable, and worth investigating further. If your thesis involved hypothesis testing, you might also state whether your hypothesis was correct.

In this video we reviewed

- What an abstract is,
- Why it is important, and
- What information you must include in the abstract.

Part 2 of this series, How to Write a Good Abstract for Your Graduate Capstone Thesis, will take you through the steps of writing the first draft of your abstract.