

Writing Abstracts for Bachelor's and Master's Theses

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What Is an Abstract?

An abstract is a greatly condensed version of a longer piece of writing that highlights the major points covered, and concisely describes the content and scope of the writing.

Why Are Abstracts Used?

Abstracts give readers a chance to quickly see what the main contents and sometimes methods of a piece of writing are. They enable readers to decide whether the work is of interest for them.

Using key words in an abstract is important because of today's electronic information systems. A web search will find an abstract containing certain key words.

What Is Usually Included in an Abstract?

- a title identical to the title of the thesis
- the name of the author
- the date of the thesis
- where the thesis is submitted or published
- the main topic of the thesis
- the purpose of the thesis
- the methods used to research information
- further sub-sections within the thesis
- results, conclusions, or recommendations

Qualities of a Good Abstract

A good abstract has the following qualities:

- uses one or more well developed paragraphs: these are unified, coherent, concise
- uses an introduction/body/conclusion structure which presents the purpose, results, conclusions, and recommendations
- follows the chronology of the thesis
- provides logical connections between the information included
- adds no new information, but simply summarizes
- often uses passive verbs to downplay the author and emphasize information

Steps for Writing Effective Abstracts

To write an effective abstract, follow these steps:

- write the abstract after you have finished the thesis
- identify the aims, methods, scope, results, conclusions, and recommendations of your thesis in key words
- use your headings and table of contents as a guide to writing your abstract
- when you have finished use spellcheck software
- show the abstract to someone who has not read your thesis and ask him / her if the abstract makes good sense

Types of Thesis – How to Say Them in English

Bachelorarbeit: bachelor's thesis

Masterarbeit: master's thesis

Doktorarbeit: doctoral thesis, doctorate

Note carefully the correct use of the apostrophe. You would only use capital letters if this was part of a title – see the next section on titles and headings below.

Length of Abstracts

150–350 words should be enough for an abstract for a bachelor's or master's thesis, but you can check with your thesis supervisor.

A Simple Abstract Structure

A short abstract can be a single paragraph. Or you can divide your abstract into short paragraphs:

First paragraph: state what the thesis is about, give a simple statement of aims and methods

Second paragraph: explain the structure of the thesis and say something about the content

Third paragraph: give a concluding statement, including a short summary of the results

Abstract and Thesis Titles and Headings

Abstract and thesis titles should be kept as short and sweet as possible and be to the point. There are simple rules for the use of capital letters in titles, headings and subheadings in English, including abstract and thesis titles. These are:

- headings and sub-headings should not end with full stops
- do not place headings and sub-headings within quotation marks
- first and last word should always be capitalized
- do not capitalize articles (the, a, an), prepositions (to, from, with, over, etc.), or coordinating conjunctions (and, for, or, nor, etc.)
- do capitalize nouns, verbs (even short ones like Is), adverbs, adjectives, subordinating conjunctions (Although, Because, Due to, etc.) and pronouns (He, Their, etc.)

Examples thesis headings:

The Use of Abstracts in International Contexts: A Comparative Study

Personnel Management in European IT Companies, with Particular Reference to McElroy Ltd, Dublin

The Development of Glass Fibre Technologies at Bond AG, Munich

The use of “with Particular Reference to” is a good way of expressing the German “am Beispiel von” which is often used in thesis titles. You can also just use a preposition, at or in:

The Introduction of RFID Technology in the University Library at UAS Wildau

Example abstract heading:

Greg Bond, Business and Law, University of Applied Sciences Wildau

Abstract of Bachelor's Thesis, Submitted 29 February 2009:

The Use of English in Business Law Degrees in Germany, in Particular at UAS Wildau

Abstract Language

Introduction (usually in present, could also be in present perfect or simple past tense):

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of ... on ...

The goals of this study are to determine ...

The primary purpose of this study is to determine ...

This study is specifically concerned with the effect of ... on ...

This study is an initial attempt to investigate the relationship ...

This study has two major purposes: (1) to investigate ... (2) to demonstrate ...

The aim of this study is to identify the characteristics of ...

The major objective of this study is to ...

The aim/topic/goal of the present paper is to ...

This thesis discusses/describes/analyses/studies/focuses on/deals with ...

This study/experiment/research/survey was aimed at developing/improving/testing ...

The project was designed to ...

Materials and Methods (in past tense):

This study was conducted in North Karelia / at North Karelia Polytechnic.

The empirical part of this study was conducted in May 2000.

Data for this study/research were collected/gathered/obtained from/by/through/with the help of/among ...

The subjects of this study were ...

The subjects were randomly selected.

The sample was selected from ...

Twenty companies served as subjects in a study designed to investigate ...

Six groups, each consisting of ..., were formed to ...

Twenty companies were selected for this investigation.

Using local and national data, this study was designed to investigate.

This questionnaire investigated how companies view their ...

A questionnaire was distributed/mailed/sent to ...

Respondents filled in a form/indicated their preferences/rated each item.

Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ... to ...

The response rate was ...

All 59 subjects participated in the study.

Interviews were conducted by/with ...

The interviews were recorded on audiotape.

Conclusions (in simple present or past tense):

These results suggest that ...

The results show that/reveal ...

It was concluded that ...

This study/survey shows/supports/questions/implies/indicates ...

On the basis of the results of this research, it can be concluded that ...

The results provide some support for ...(ing)...

The results did not support the expectations that ...

These data support the view that ...

Further vocabulary

1. **Verbs:** show, demonstrate, illustrate, prove, argue, examine, explore, look into, consider, deal with, address, involve, relate to, refer to, draw on, explain, investigate, highlight, outline, provide an overview of, define, distinguish between, indicate, support, reveal, suggest, conclude, recommend
2. **Nouns:** intention, purpose, aim, objective, thesis, argument, issue, assumptions, methods, premises, results, conclusions, outcome, recommendations
3. **Connecting words:** however, first, second, then, finally, thus, for example, furthermore, in addition, in conclusion, by contrast, nonetheless, consequently, etc.

Sample abstracts 1

Greg Bond, Business and Law, University of Applied Sciences Wildau

Abstract of Bachelor's Thesis, Submitted 29 February 2009:

Writing Abstracts in English for Bachelor's and Master's Theses at the UAS Wildau

The aim of this thesis is to investigate and identify the present status of abstract writing in English for bachelor's and master's theses at the UAS Wildau, and to make recommendations for students who are required to produce abstracts in English.

In the first part, results of a short empirical survey of the university faculties and degree programs are presented. These show that there is growing demand for student abstracts in English, but at present students receive very little guidance in this matter.

The thesis then identifies the uses of an English abstract, and further outlines the structure of an abstract. In a detailed central section the thesis provides students with useful practical tips on the language of abstracts, including rules for creating headings and titles, and giving lists of phrases and vocabulary that are commonly used in abstracts. Here, the thesis draws on a number of sources from other universities and books on academic writing in English.

In conclusion, the thesis argues that abstract writing in English is essential but that students should not be expected to be able to write good abstracts without assistance. This thesis hopes to offer all UAS Wildau students useful tips on writing abstracts in English, and thus make a small contribution to improving the general standard of bachelor's and master's theses.

Sample abstracts 2

Greg Bond, Physics Engineering, University of Applied Sciences Wildau

Abstract of Master's Thesis, Submitted 29 February 2009:

Development of NonoXYZ Technologies to Ascertain the Existence of Cheese on the Moon

The aim of this thesis is to test the use of NonoXYZ technologies in ascertaining the existence of cheese on the moon.

NonoXYZ technologies have been successfully used to test the existence of water in Wildau, but to date no further applications are known. For this reason the author decided to test further applications, with the aim of describing the technology's suitability for further development.

This thesis first examines the testing procedures for the water in Wildau experiment, and presents the results. In a second stage several adaptations to NonoXYZ for the testing of the existence of cheese on the moon are undertaken. Finally the technology is applied to the question of cheese on the moon, within a six-week testing phase. At the end of each week the testing apparatus is fine tuned, and experiment results are charted every twenty-four hours.

The results of the experiment show that NonoXYZ technologies are well suited to ascertaining the presence of water in Wildau, but were unable to be sufficiently modified for the purpose of ascertaining the existence of cheese on the moon. The author recommends further modification to the technology before any other uses are considered.

Sources and Further Reading

North Karelia University, language services department, guidelines for writing an abstract

In the UAS Wildau university library:

Jordan, R.R., *Academic Writing Course*, Longman, 2002

Oshima, Alice and Hogue, Ann, *Writing Academic English*, Pearson Education, New York, 2006

Zemach, Dorothy E. and Lisa A. Rumisek *Zemach, Dorothy E. and Lisa A. Rumisek, Academic Writing from Paragraph to Essay*, Macmillan, 2005

Exercise on the Use of Capitals in Headings

Do the correct capitalization for the following headings / sub-headings some of which may contain mistakes:

Description of the Grant Applicant Institution's study and research facilities

The European dimension of technology Know-how and Transfer

Investigation of Existing wireless and mobile communication systems

Needs and constraints in British Higher Education related to the improvement of the quality of student support services

LLP Interfaces to MP&L, suppliers and carriers

Porous Ceramics Based on a Foam System of Recycling Materials

The Way Exercises are Used in Physics Teaching

Communication and Media Competence among Children and Juveniles in Early Learning Support and in Class

Draft proposal for the "Teaching Processes Graduate School": excellence initiative by the German Federal and State governments

Problems and needs at the Partner Country's universities

Development of the project idea and preparation of the project proposal

Presentation and explanation of the research framework concept and the connections to the research profile of the university and the participating faculties

List of Planned Measures to be financed by DFG Funds

Answers to Exercise on Page 9

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