

ARTS – Guidelines for Writing an Abstract

I. Background

Generally, the maturity test is performed at the bachelor's degree stage. When it is approved in connection with a bachelor-level degree, it is no longer necessary to carry it out at the master's level. The maturity test has two functions: a student expresses the command of having learned the content information, and his/her ability to express it in written form. In the maturity test, the student demonstrates that s/he has actually made his/her final project (either a bachelor's or master's degree thesis), and that s/he has reached an appropriate level of written expression in his/her professional area. The maturity test language skills for Finnish and Swedish are reviewed by the Aalto University Language Centre, but not for English (as is not one of the national languages).

II. General guidelines

These guidelines are intended for ARTS students who need to write an abstract in English for either a bachelor's or master's thesis.

What is an abstract?

A concise and clear summary of ...
What your research set out to do and why
How you did it
What you found
(implications/recommendations)
... that is capable of standing alone, independent of the thesis.

What is its function?

- Serves as a stand-alone “mini text”
- Provides a short summary of the topic, purpose, methodology, and main findings
- Helps readers decide whether to read the whole thesis or not
- Gives readers an immediate overview of the thesis
- Appears as the first "content" page of your thesis and thus forms the first impression of your work

How long?

300-400 words maximum. Using 300 words or less requires writing concisely and summarizing.

When to write it?

Write it **last!** In other words, write it after you have finished your thesis. However, reserve enough time for it. Writing a condensed summary takes time – so start soon enough – to allow time for a review process.

Style?

- A few pointers about formal written English
- Use neutral, objective, academic language. For examples of useful **academic phraseology**, see <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>
 - Write with **active voice** in general as it is the preferred voice in formal written English. This does not mean use **I** or **We** as the subject (of every sentence). Rather, keep the focus on the research by using active agents, such as *This study investigates ... Fashion Designers need to ...* . Thus, the advice is to use passive voice sparingly. Note, it is commonly used when explaining research methods. It is also acceptable to use it when it enhances clarity and brevity. For further explanations, see <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/539/02/>
 - Avoid putting **references** in an abstract – this is a general rule (to which there may be exceptions)

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Review process?

- Use **present tense** – normally – to describe results and conclusions that are still applicable, and **past tense** to describe what was done and found.
- Draft your abstract and then ask a fellow student or friend to comment on it.
- Use their questions and comments to guide your revision, which should result in a stand-alone, mini-text of your thesis
- Submit your abstract
 - MA thesis? Send for review to writingclinic@aalto.fi
 - BA thesis? Send it to your thesis advisor.

III. Structural guidelines

This section outlines two alternative structures (A & B) for writing an abstract in ARTS. Choose the one that best suits the type of search you have conducted.

Structure A

Situation

What is the situation or context?

- The research engages in a design activity (State the specific situation/context)
- What is the reason for the work?

Problem

What is the problem or opportunity (=good problem) under investigation?

- The research confronts a design problem (and its effects)
- What is the **specific** problem, controversy, or gap in current knowledge?
- What is the time period – past, present, or future?
 - Problem lies in the past – the study announced that it has been solved
 - Problem is current – the study points out the problem and (usually) proposes a solution
 - Proposal for future action – the study will improve some existing problem
 - Problem exists 'outside' a time sequence – the study examines 'how to'

Solution

What are the potential solutions?

- Identify/state two or more potential solutions
 - Example: Follow the guidance in the design pattern presented in the study. Note: Be specific!

Evaluation

How effective are the solutions? (Be specific!)

- By applying the solution, the problem will probably be solved
- Claim that the research has filled the gap
- Make a recommendation

Conclusion (optional)

What is the overall conclusion?

- Summarize the main points

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Structure B

Background/introduction/ problematization (What?)
Purpose (Why?)
Methods/materials/ subjects/procedures (How? What? Who?)
Product/results/findings (What did you find?)
Discussion/conclusion/ implication/recommendation (What does it mean?)

Establish the context and relevance of the research

- What do we know about the topic?
- Why is the topic important/ relevant?

State author's intention, thesis, purpose, hypothesis, or goal

- Why was this study done?
- What motivated the study?
- How does this goal differ from others?

Specify kind and treatment of data, scope and limits of the study

- What was done and how?
- What was the methodology or experimental design?
- What limits were imposed?

Indicate your findings and summarize your results or what was achieved

- What did you find?
- What was achieved?

Note: This is the longest part of the abstract!

State the implications and inferences drawn

- What is the value of your findings?
- How do we interpret your results?
- What may we conclude?
- How do your findings apply to a broader context?

These guidelines have been compiled by Dr. Diane Pilkinton-Pihko at the Language Centre, Aalto University. Key sources include Michael Hoey (1994) Signalling in discourse: a functional analysis of a common discourse pattern in written and spoken English. In *Advances in Written Text Analysis*, Eds M. Coulthard. London: Routledge; Ken Hyland (2000) *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing*, Harlow, UK: Pearson Education; and John Swales and Christine Feak (2012), *Abstracts and the Writing of Abstracts*, University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor.