

Key questions for writing and/or assessing an abstract

As an abstract writer, you are trying to seduce others to read your work, bidding for inclusion in journals and conferences, and positioning yourself as a legitimate knower in a particular scholarly community. The following questions may help you to craft an abstract that addresses these goals and also critique others.

Locating the work

- What's the research problem being addressed?
- How do I locate the significance of my/ another's work?
- What conversation am I in? Where am I/ is the author standing to research this problem?
- What do I/does the author offer as an alternative to existing research?
- What is my/the author's argument?

Locating the researcher/author

- How do I/does the author represent myself/herself/himself as researcher? (I, we, passive, the paper)
- How much reference do I/does the author make to the research method/methodology and in what way?
- Given that researchers do not work alone and are part of a larger global research community, what do I/does the author say about the location of the research?

So what? Why read this?

- 'Given that there is a plethora of possible research available in publication, why read this and not something else?'

A genre in its own right

- Does the abstract make sense on its own (without the paper)?

Adapted from:

Kamler, B., & Thomson, P. (2004). Driven to abstraction: Doctoral supervision and writing pedagogies. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 9(2), 195-209.

NB: In their survey of journal abstracts, Kamler and Thomson found only one, an online journal, which clearly articulated what was required beyond word length and key words:

- The country in which the research took place due to the international nature of research
- The claim to knowledge that the writers were making
- The boundaries of space and time within which the enquiry occurred
- The method of enquiry (at least a hint)
- Be neither a 'trailer' nor an 'introduction' to the paper but stand on its own

From our own perspective what is missing in this list is reference to how the findings made a scholarly contribution.