



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
(International) in the United Kingdom
Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations

Introduction: Why Write Abstracts?

Abstracts are important tools for readers. With the proliferation of information in print, abstracts are more in demand than ever before.

Abstracts help people identify books they aim to read or consult for their studies. Rather than inspecting hundreds of books, researchers can browse through abstracts to decide if a book is relevant. Abstracts are also invaluable for assessing the quality of a piece of writing.

An abstract provides an overview of the book and makes reading the text easier and more efficient. It saves librarians and researchers time.

Writing an Abstract - How to Begin:

- Find a book which fits within the themes of the MCA project and which corresponds to your field of interest.
- Email the title of the book or encyclopaedia to the MCA team. Once the title(s) have been approved, read the book or encyclopaedia, and start writing the abstract.

Types of Abstracts:

There are two types of abstracts; **informative** and **descriptive**.

- **Descriptive Abstract:** A descriptive abstract only outlines the topics covered in a book and is no more useful than a table of contents. It does not fulfil MCA purposes.
- **Informative Abstract:** An informative abstract provides details about the substance of a piece of writing.

Abstracts in any discipline typically follow this **format**:

- 1) **Purpose/Content:** The scope of the work/summary. What gap is this research filling or claiming to fill? What is interesting about this book? Does it have an impact?
- 2) **Methods/Procedure/Approach/Organisation:** Does it have a method/a special approach?
- 3) **Results/Findings/Shortcomings:** What can be learned from this book? What kind of evidence does the author provide? Are there any shortcomings or biases? How is the overall quality?
- 4) **Conclusion: Concise statement** of the major points.

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Some Advice

- It is important to note that the weight afforded to the components mentioned above can **vary by discipline**.
- Following a **checklist strategy** in gathering information should make it easier to write **an abstract**.
- Bear in mind that **the target audience** of the abstract are scholars as well as general readers (even if the selected book was not intended for both groups).
- Within this framework, one can still **be creative**.

Tips for Writing Quality Abstracts

- The usage of **key words** in an abstract is vital, as in cases where the information is stored electronically; it may allow interested parties to locate the abstract more easily.
- Sentences and paragraphs have to be **concise**. Abstracts are not detailed book reviews; therefore they have to be focused and should establish the scope of the book.
- Take notes as you read, **highlighting the major points** of the piece and outlining the significant details: list the **ideas** that the book communicates.

Other Considerations

- An abstract should be self-contained and not make vague statements.
- Meet the **word count limit**.
- List keywords.

Finally

Writing an **effective abstract** should not necessarily be hard work if these few steps are followed. With practice you will not only become a good abstract writer, but also a good communicator as you will be able to put across ideas in a clear and succinct manner. Through your involvement with the MCA, your work will be read by many people and you will have the opportunity to develop valuable academic relationships.

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