

Writing abstracts, introductions and conclusions for a thesis or report

Abstracts, the introductions and the conclusions all seem to require you to include similar details but each needs to be written differently because they all have different purposes.

Abstracts

The purpose of the abstract is to preview or summarise the whole thesis or report. The basic expectation in writing an abstract is that it summarises the contents, conclusion, new information and relevance of the thesis/paper. When the abstract accompanies the paper, it functions as a preview; when it is separated from the paper, the same text serves as a summary. Usually the order of the information in the abstract is the same as the order of the whole paper's main points/ideas.

Introductions

The purpose of the introduction is to locate or situate your chapter/paper in the broader field or area of study and to link your main topic to the field. In fact, the topic itself is the main focus of the introduction.

The basic expectation in writing an introduction is to move from the general to the specific:

- some kind of introduction to the whole field or area indicating its significance and/or summarising what is known
- an explanation of how your research fits into the whole field i.e. show its relationship
- justifying the need for your research or study by explaining its role in the field
- clarifying the research by stating its specific aims
- an outline of the main sub sections.

Conclusions

The main purpose of the conclusion is to provide generalisations based on your findings, implications of those findings and recommendations for future work.

The order of the information is:

- generalisations
- implications
- recommendations for future work.

Activity:

Answer the following sets of questions to draft your abstract, introduction and conclusion.

The Abstract	The Introduction	The Conclusion
What is the main topic or theme? Why was the research done? How was the research done? What are the main points made in your thesis/paper?	What major area/research does your topic fit into? What is your topic about? What are the main sub-topics in your thesis/paper?	What generalisations can be made of the findings? What are the implications of the findings? What future work/study can be recommended?

Adapted from: Murison, E & Webb, C 1991, *Writing a research paper*, Learning Assistance Centre, University of Sydney, NSW.