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RESEARCH AND SURGERY

The importance of writing a great abstract

La importancia de escribir un buen resumen

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Abstract

Introduction. A convincing summary is the entrance to an investigation. It often determines whether readers will continue exploring a certain work or move on to another. A well-crafted abstract is also crucial for citations and visibility, being the most read and shared part of an article.

Methods. A narrative review of the available literature on the topic was carried out and the most relevant aspects were synthesized.

Results. Structured abstracts guide readers through the research. It is divided into four clear sections: Introduction, Methods, Results and Conclusion. After establishing the objective, the abstract should briefly describe the methods used during the research. A brief interpretation of the findings should then be provided and their implications discussed. It should end with a brief conclusion that emphasizes the importance of the study.

Conclusion. A great abstract ensures that a piece of research reaches the right audience. Among the four sections, the results are the heart of the summary, so they should be clear and brief. By following the steps described here, you can create a summary that effectively synthesizes research and makes it more attractive to read.

Keywords: abstracts; journal article; scholarly communication; research; general surgery.

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Resumen

Introducción. Un resumen convincente es la puerta de entrada a una investigación, por lo que a menudo determina si los lectores seguirán explorando un determinado trabajo o pasarán a otro. Un resumen bien elaborado también es crucial para las citas y la visibilidad, al ser la parte más leída y compartida de un artículo.

Métodos. Se hizo una revisión narrativa de la literatura disponible sobre el tema y se sintetizaron los aspectos más relevantes.

Resultados. Los resúmenes estructurados guían a los lectores a través de la investigación. Se divide en cuatro secciones claras: Introducción, Métodos, Resultados y Conclusión. Después de establecer el objetivo, el resumen debe describir brevemente los métodos utilizados durante la investigación. Luego se debe proporcionar una breve interpretación de los hallazgos y discutir sus implicaciones. Debe terminar con una breve conclusión que enfatice la importancia del estudio.

Conclusión. Un excelente resumen garantiza que una investigación llegue a la audiencia adecuada. Entre las cuatro secciones, los resultados son el corazón del resumen, por lo que deben ser claros y breves. Siguiendo los pasos aquí descritos, se podrá crear un resumen que sintetice de manera efectiva una investigación y haga su lectura más atractiva.

Palabras clave: resúmenes; artículo de revista; comunicación académica; investigación; cirugía general.

Introduction

The importance of writing a good abstract should not be underestimated. A convincing abstract is the gateway to an investigation. It often determines whether readers will continue exploring a certain work or move on to another. In today's competitive academic environment, where countless articles are published daily, a good abstract is the main opportunity to stand out, as it attracts readers and influences the initial decision of reviewers and editors, potentially affecting the acceptance of an article for publication.

A well-crafted abstract is also crucial for citations and visibility, being the most read and shared part of an article. A great summary ensures that a piece of research reaches the right audience. Although it is the last thing one writes when wants to present a scientific article, its structure must be planned from the moment one begins writing the complete manuscript.

The value of a structured abstract

In today's fast-paced world, clarity is essential. This is where structured abstracts become important as they act as organized roadmaps and guide readers through research. They are increasingly favored in academic publications, especially in scientific journals. Unlike unstructured abstracts, which are written as a single, continuous paragraph, structured abstracts are divided into clear sections, such as Introduction, Methods, Results, and Conclusion.

This format offers several advantages:

- They provide clarity and accessibility, helping readers quickly locate and understand the most relevant information. Each section has a specific focus, which reduces ambiguity.
- By following a standardized format, it promotes consistency between articles. This uniformity is particularly useful for reviewers and readers who must compare multiple studies or quickly grasp key points from different articles.
- They offer efficiency, saving time by allowing you to go directly to the sections that matter most. Whether a reader is primarily interested in Methods or Results, they can easily navigate that part of the abstract.

- They provide improved visibility and discoverability, as the standardized format of structured abstracts also improves database indexing, making an investigation more visible. Each section of a summary can be tagged with relevant keywords, increasing the chances that others in the same field will find the publication.

In essence, a structured abstract improves the readability of a work, its scope and impact, ensuring that given research is accessible and attractive to a broad audience [1-3].

Suitable extension

The length of an abstract is important. Most journals have limits of 150 to 300 words, so every word counts. A brief abstract allows you to focus on the most important parts of an investigation so that readers can quickly understand its meaning. However, it is also important to include all critical information, such as the objective, method, results, and conclusions.

Finding the right balance between being brief and providing enough detail is crucial to creating an effective abstract.

Objective: setting the stage

This section should be concise but rich in information, to understand the need for the study, without overwhelming the reader with too many details. The opening of the abstract should clearly articulate the context and purpose of the study. This involves exposing the research by placing it within a broader field. The previous context provides a brief introduction to the problem that the research addresses and explains its importance, in addition to analyzing the existing literature to show its relevance and importance [1-3].

The second key element is to clearly formulate the specific research question or hypothesis that the research aims to answer. Generally speaking, it is recommended that the last sentence of the introduction be the objective of the study.

Methods: transmit focus

After establishing the objective, the abstract should briefly describe the methods used during the research:

- Specify the design of the study: Was it experimental, observational, qualitative or quantitative?
- Any important methodology, tools or technology used should be highlighted, especially if the approach is novel or relevant.
- Mention sample size, patient selection, and data collection methods, as these can often lend credibility to your findings.

The goal here is to give readers a snapshot of how the research was conducted, ensuring that the rigor and reliability of the study is understood [1-3].

Results and discussion: analysis of the findings

The results are the heart of the abstract, so they should be communicated clearly and briefly. Technical definitions should be avoided to ensure that the abstract is easily understandable, highlighting critical information, such as statistically significant correlations or unexpected trends that deserve special attention. After presenting the results, a brief interpretation of the findings should be provided and the implications of the results within the broader field should be discussed, emphasizing their impact on theory, practice, or future research. It is always important to recognize any important limitations of a study, as this not only shows a critical evaluation of the research but also enhances the credibility of the researcher.

This combined section should provide a comprehensive overview of the research findings, offering readers both the essential results and their context.

Conclusion

An abstract should end with a brief conclusion that emphasizes the importance of the study. You should summarize the key findings and their importance and ask what readers should take away from the study, as this is your last chance to make a lasting impression. If appropriate, potential areas for future research should be discussed.

A strong conclusion provides a sense of completion and ensures that readers recognize the importance of the research conducted.

Keywords: visibility improvement

It is important to select specific keywords for research, taking them from structured vocabularies or collections of terms such as DeCS - Descriptors in Health Sciences, created by BIREME (https://decs.bvsalud.org/) or MeSH - Medical Subject Headings from the U.S. National Library of Medicine (https://www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh/meshhome.html), so that others in the same field can find them easily. You should avoid using ambiguous terms that may distract from the main focus of the work and consider what terms potential readers or researchers might use when searching for similar studies. Selecting relevant and specific keywords improves search engine optimization and indexing, making your work more visible to a broader audience.

Review: polish the abstract

The last step in creating a great abstract is to review it. Even if the initial draft is solid, there is always room for improvement. Here are some tips for revision:

- Seek feedback by sharing the abstract with colleagues, mentors, or reviewers who can provide constructive criticism. A fresh look can detect errors and suggest improvements that may have been overlooked.
- Edit for clarity and make sure each sentence is clear and concise, removing any unnecessary words that may obscure meaning.
- Check compliance with the journal's submission guidelines to ensure that the abstract meets all format, structure, and word count requirements. A well-polished abstract reflects the care and attention throughout the manuscript.

Final words

Creating a great abstract is both an art and a science. You should be able to simplify complex research into a short, interesting story that captures readers' attention and shows the importance of a work. By following the steps described, you will be able to create a summary that effectively synthesizes research and leaves readers, editors, and peer reviewers with a strong, positive impression.

Compliance with ethical standards

Informed consent: This study is a literature review, and as such, there is no need for informed consent or Institutional Ethics Committee approval.

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- Acquisition of data: Patrizio Petrone, Mónica Bejarano.
- Data analysis and interpretation: Patrizio Petrone, Mónica Bejarano.
- Drafting the manuscript: Patrizio Petrone, Mónica Bejarano.
- Critical review and final approval: Patrizio Petrone, Mónica Bejarano.

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