

Writing an abstract or executive summary

What is an abstract or executive summary?

An abstract is often also referred to as an executive summary or summary, depending on the type of assessment you are writing. Its job is to give the reader a succinct overview of the whole report. The abstract gives a reader a good idea of what is in report without them having to read the whole report to find out what it's about. After you read the abstract, you can then decide if you need to read the whole report. For example, executives could read the abstract and make decisions and/or pass the report on to those who make decisions. Students could decide whether or not a report/journal article is relevant to their study, by merely reading the abstract.

It is important to note that the abstract:

- is usually written after the rest of the report to make sure that it gives the reader an overview of the complete report
- is generally placed on a separate page at the beginning of the report after the title page.

Features of an Abstract or Executive Summary

There is generally at least one sentence from most sections of the report. For example, in a research report, the abstract would generally contain at least one sentence about:

- the aim/purpose of the report
- the procedure/methodology/analytical process
- main results/findings
- conclusion/s (based on the results & discussion)
- any recommendations (if applicable).

Example of an Abstract

The aim of this study was to detect the presence, abundance and distribution of a number of targeted frog species in north-eastern NSW. This study was part of a long-term monitoring program to provide valuable baseline data on rainforest frog populations for conservation management of the area. The survey involved recording data on the presence, numbers and distribution of frog species at three locations: the Border Ranges National Park, Whian Whian S.F and the Richmond Range area, over a four-week period in September/October 1997. Three of the seven target species were detected, one of which is listed as rare and vulnerable in NSW. Given that the gathering of baseline data is incomplete, it is recommended that monitoring continue to enable the identification of critical habitat areas for conservation management and for the reassessment of protection status. Continued monitoring may also help to identify the processes responsible for recent frog decline.

Key:

- Aim/purpose of the report
- Procedure/methodology/analytical process
- Main results/findings
- Conclusion/s (based on the results & discussion)
- Recommendations (if applicable)

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