

20 tips for creating good abstracts - Checklist

A: SECTIONS

1. **TITLE: Emphasize results** (and among results, the new ones) and **specify the time and place.**
2. **INTRODUCTION: Use two-sentences** to address (a) the rationale and (b) the objective(s).
3. **METHODS: Describe** methods used, including data analysis, as to understand how the objectives were reached. Indicators calculated are more important than software used.
4. **RESULTS: Maximize the presentation of facts, data and indicators.** Include denominators for rates and proportions. Mention proportion of cases exposed. Specify measures of associations and confidence intervals.
5. **CONCLUSION: Interpret results beyond simple repetitions or paraphrase** and avoid claims around the study quality. Ensure all results needed to conclude are in the results section. Build upon results to integrate pieces of evidence that answer the objectives.
6. **RECOMMENDATIONS: Base recommendations / next steps solely on the abstract's conclusion statement**, which was derived from the results .
7. **TECHNICAL REFERENCE:** Document that the work is in conformity with the recommended methodological approach for the type of project (e.g., Documents all the key steps of an outbreak investigation).
8. **SELF-CONTAINED ABSTRACT: Knit the abstract together logically and consistently**, section by section, so that it stands alone with no reference to external information, references or figures. Everything must be needed, consistent and inter-related.

B: DATA

9. **Rounding up: Round up measures of associations** and their CIs to **two meaningful digits** (e.g., 240, 24, 2.4, 0.24). Note that for three digits odds ratio, this involves rounding up (567 becomes 570). **Remove decimals to round up percentages.**

C: WRITING STYLE: THE SEVEN 'S'

10. **Simplicity:** Use simple words and concepts, avoiding jargon and labels.
11. **Specificity:** Maximize the quantity and precision of information. Prefer quantifications over qualifications.
12. **Sequentiality:** Use a temporal, geographical or logical sequence to tell the story from beginning to end; from global to local and from general to specific.
13. **Short:** Write concisely: Say it once, say it well and say it in the right place.
14. **Strong:** Use verbs to convey meaning. The verbs are the centres of gravity of the sentences.
15. **Systematic:** Use the right words, and do so consistently when referring to the same thing. Make sure you use terms like 'significant', 'match', 'correlate' etc... as per their accepted usage in epidemiology and statistics. Differentiate the pathogen from the infection and the infection from the disease.
16. **Structured:** Structure (or not) the abstract as per the recommendations of the journal / conference. Most recommend structured abstracts. However, some do recommend unstructured abstracts.

D: GRAMMAR

17. **Prefer active voice:** Use active voice throughout as it documents subjects that are important. Consider the passive voice only if the subject is obvious or un-important.
18. **Select tenses appropriately:** Use the past to report results and the present for established facts.

E: PROOF

19. **Word count:** Stick to the word limit as excessive word count will mean refusal.
20. **Proof:** Check spelling and proof read.