

ABSTRACT

Innovations in Medical Education

Abstract: to drag out from

What is an abstract? A formal summary of a project that must adhere to a word limit and follow set rules. It involves condensing the essence of a project into a paragraph or two that communicate as much information as possible to the reader. For works in progress, the abstract may be the first time the project progress is summarized in writing.

Why prepare an abstract? Because it serves as a vehicle for a dialogue or conversation about your project. It lets you communicate your scholarly work to others. It lets you draw on the expertise of your colleagues to help with unresolved issues and questions.

What are the key components for a works in progress abstract? 1) Title and author, 2) Statement of the problem/question, 3) Objectives of the project/intervention, 4) Description of the project/intervention, 5) Findings to date/evaluation to date, 6) Key lessons learned so far, and 7) Unanswered questions (1-2 questions to elicit input from the audience).

How many words should be in the abstract? Whatever guidelines you are given by the group you are submitting to, typically from 250-400 words. For the February 2005 School of Medicine Retreat, the limit will be 400 words.

What level of detail should it contain? Only what is absolutely necessary. Leave out what's not essential.

What makes a person read the abstract?

HOOK your reader with your first sentence. Examples include "A fundamental unresolved issue . . .," "_____ is one of the most important issues facing medical education.", "The discovery of _____ has led to_____."

PUNCH with your last sentence to show how important your project is. Examples include "With the gathering of this information, we can now show. . .", "These results will serve as a platform for . . .", "Our success will show . . ."

How can you make sure readers understand the main points you want to make?

ASK non-content experts to read your abstract. Have them tell you what they think your project is about in 3-4 sentences. If they got the gist, then your abstract has communicated the essence of your project. If not, ask the readers where they got derailed, i.e., "I meant to say _____. What would I need to say to get that across to you?" Revise, count words, get a reader to check your abstract again.