Article Abstracts Overview (Collaborative)

Abstracting Articles helps you focus on the critical aspects of a research article—the dependent and independent variable(s) and the relation between them. **Article Abstracts are done individually. If your instructor assigns more than one abstract assignment, plan for the research you summarize to come from different journals.**

Abstracts will be used for your literature review for your project. This week each member of your group is to look independently for a research article. The article must report on a study in which an independent variable was *manipulated* and the effect on behavior assessed, but the study can use either group comparisons or repeated measures (baseline and treatment on the same participant(s)). If you can find an article related to your project, it will save you time later, but for this assignment, any experimental research article will do.

**Article Abstracts**

On the paper you hand in, number each section 1 through 5. Numbers in parentheses are the points for each section.

1. (2) **Reference:** Give the complete reference, including page numbers. Consult your instructor for reference style.

2. (4) **Pinpoint the dependent variable (DV) and the main independent variable(s).** If more than one experiment is included in the study, pick one for your abstract.

   The **dependent variable** (DV) will always be behavior of some kind or its immediate product (i.e. *words written* is a product of writing). If it is stated in general terms (i.e. aggressive behavior) you should give specific examples of what was **measured or counted** (swearing, kicking, or whatever would meet the criterion of a good pinpoint). Note the DV does **not** include the participants or the setting.

   - **Good Statement of DV:** “kicks or hits (to peers)”
   - **Not:** “inappropriate conduct towards peers”

   The **independent variable** (IV) is what the researcher tried, or varied, in order to change the behavior specified by the dependent variable. There may be more than one independent variable. Pick only one for your abstract. Answering “What did the researcher vary?” usually gives a good idea of what the independent variable was.

   - **Good Statement of IV:** “Medium of presentation (auditory versus visual).”
   - **Not:** “How short-term memory was affected as a result of material presented visually or via auditory methods.”
**Good Statement of IV:** “Kind of consequence: Stickers versus praise.”

**Not:** “The researchers tried two kinds of consequences: stickers and praise.”

3. (2) Attach a copy of the first page of the article.

4 (10) Write your abstract (150 words or fewer): Try not to look at the abstract written by the authors (if they have one). Rather, in your own words, describe what the authors investigated. If they are vague, look at what they measured. Then describe what the experimenters did (what independent variables they looked at or varied) and summarize their results (what they found). Be specific and concrete so that any of your classmates could replicate the study from your description, and so that your reader can tell how much of an effect (if any) the researchers found. NOTE: Authors’ abstracts often use vague descriptions of effects such as “The procedure was very effective.” You need to give some quantitative indication of the change in the dependent variable, such as “There was a 20% increase in .. (dependent variable)..... following the application of .... (the procedure).” From reading what you write, the reader of your abstract should be able to sketch a graph or table, or cite statistics which are pretty close to the results described in the body of the article. If the authors do not give any numerical information, say that the researcher(s) do not provide information on (whatever it is they don’t provide).

5. (2) Your Reactions: Give your personal opinion about the article. Feel free to express whatever thoughts you had while reading. (You should have had some reactions!) Do try, however, to keep your reactions to a paragraph. Grade points for reactions do not depend upon the position you take, so say clearly what you really think.

**An Example of a Good Abstract**

(this one uses APA reference style)


2. (Here the first page of the article would be included.)

3. Dependent Variable: Pounds of paper deposited in trash cans each day.
   Independent Variable: Posted Feedback on the pounds of paper recycled the previous day.

4. Abstract: Posted feedback was used to measure recycling behavior in a student mail room. A four-week design was employed. Two recycling bins were placed in the mail room. A 14-day pretreatment baseline period was used to determine the daily amount of paper recycled prior to intervention. During a 7-day experimental intervention period a sign was posted stating the
number of pounds of paper recycled the previous day. The last 7 days the sign was removed and data continued to be taken. Results indicate there was an immediate increase of 76% above the baseline condition during the intervention. Recycling behavior continued during the follow-up condition at 46% above the baseline level.

5. Personal Opinion: I find it intriguing that just a posted sign can increase the recycling to such a vast degree. If it does not take much effort, I wonder why greater steps have not been taken to increase recycling. This experimental study is interesting to me because it points out how easy it is to get people to recycle. It reflects the point that recycling is very simple, but benefits us all in the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Evaluation Checklist for Article Abstracts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reference is complete and in the correct format.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dependent and Independent variables are pinpointed behaviorally.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>First page of article is attached.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Abstract is written clearly and logically in concrete rather than abstract terms. Description of research conducted is precise enough so that someone else could replicate it. Description of changes the procedure produced are described quantitatively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Personal reactions are included.</td>
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