

Writing an Abstract

According to Mike Merkel in his *Practical Strategies for Technical Communication*, “An abstract is a brief technical summary of the report [or presentation], usually no more than 200 words” (351). Of course, what you include in an abstract is going to depend upon the overall purpose and the intended audience of the document being summarized. These typically take the form of a single paragraph.

Here is a sample abstract that was written by BCC student Jason Proulx for a Chemistry presentation:

The Computerization of an Undergraduate Chemistry Laboratory - Phase Two

The introduction of computer technology in the chemistry laboratories at Bristol Community College has included Smartboard technology. The present authors compared current technology (the Smartboard) with innovative display technology, the Sympodium. As a result of this comparison, the present team recommends the inclusion of Sympodium technology in the recommended package in Phase Two. Phase Two will include (as a model) the preparation of a video-clip of a basic laboratory technique to be used in the orientation of introductory chemistry students, using Smartboard technology. This team recommends the inclusion of a Sympodium, personal computer, computer projector, printer and a computer table as the mobile computer package for the second laboratory unit in the chemistry laboratory suite at Bristol Community College. The package is designed to provide students with efficient data storage in each laboratory unit of the chemistry suite and the capability of printing data for individual use in each of the laboratories.

The following guidelines will help you as you consider writing an abstract. It is always best to refer to the assignment sheet to determine the length requirements and the specific content that need to be included. Feel free to use the space in between each category to brainstorm ideas for your abstract.

Title:

What is the name of the actual project? What is the overall focus of the project?

Purpose and Rationale:

What is the purpose of your project? Why did you undertake the project?

Methodology:

What techniques did you use to gather information? What sources did you use?

Results:

What did you learn? What new facts or lessons did you discover?

Conclusions:

Why do your results matter?

If you have additional questions or would like to have a tutor review your abstract, please visit one of our Writing Centers. Any of our tutors will be happy to assist you with your project.