



MASARYK UNIVERSITY  
Dept. of Foreign Languages



## POSTGRADUATE ACADEMIC WRITING COURSE

### SESSION 5

1. **ABSTRACT** \* *What is an abstract? What is its purpose? Is it important?*

\* **Discuss with the class group**

The abstract of a thesis, paper, article or other document is a shorter version of the original providing its gist. The aim of an abstract is to give the reader a clear, objective, accurate and balanced account of a written or spoken text. After reading the abstract, someone may decide to read the whole document (or in the case of a public presentation, attend the meeting at which the document will be read out and/or discussed). The abstract should be understandable even when read separately from the original.

(Adapted from: Malovičová, I. et al.:2005 English For Academic Purposes, CJV MU)

#### 1.2. Form and content

Abstracts are very common in academic writing, and they have a fairly standard form. Which essential parts should an abstract consist of?

\* **Read the following example of a scientific abstract.**

\* **Discuss with a partner what you think should be in an abstract, then feedback to the group.**

**BACKGROUND:** Some studies have suggested an association between paternal subfertility and hypospadias among their sons, although the association has not been systematically investigated. We therefore compared male reproductive health among a group of fathers of boys with hypospadias and a group of fathers to normal children.

**METHODS:** A total of 64 fathers of boys with hypospadias participated; 349 partners of pregnant women served as a control group. All men delivered a semen sample, had a blood sample drawn, underwent a physical examination and completed a questionnaire.

**RESULTS:** Fathers of boys with hypospadias had a significantly lower median sperm concentration ( $54.1 \times 10^6/\text{ml}$ ) ( $P = 0.004$ ) and total sperm count ( $222.0 \times 10^6$ ) ( $P = 0.009$ ) than the controls ( $81.2$  and  $326.0 \times 10^6/\text{ml}$ ). In addition, the fathers of boys with hypospadias more often reported to have had disorders in the urogenital system (hypospadias, cryptorchidism and testicular cancer) ( $11/64$ ) ( $P < 0.001$ ) than the control group ( $16/349$ ). No significant differences in waiting time to pregnancy was observed, however, 15% of fathers to boys with hypospadias had received fertility treatment.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Fathers of boys with hypospadias not only have an increased frequency of hypospadias, but also decreased semen quality. Most likely fathers and sons share the same susceptibility genes for reproductive dysfunction, but additional impact of environmental factors cannot be excluded.

C. Asklund, N. Jørgensen, N.E. Skakkebaek and T.K. Jensen: Increased frequency of reproductive health problems among fathers of boys with hypospadias; <http://humrep.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/22/10/2639>

## Content of a scientific abstract – can be defined differently:

### \* *Read through with the class group:*

**One definition:** abstracts inform the reader of six bits of important information about the piece of writing being summarized:

**Purpose** - Background information related to the study, the author's reason for writing and main idea.

**Scope** - What is the author's focus in this piece, what is the gap in knowledge to be investigated?

**Method** - The procedures followed during the study and the kinds of evidence that the author provides.

**Results** - What are the findings of the study? What is the relevance of the findings?

**Recommendations** - What solutions does the author present to the reader to resolve the problem of issue in the piece? Does the author recommend action or change in his/her piece?

**Conclusions** - Does the author describe a 'cause and effect' relationship or explain the origins of this issue or problem? What conclusions does the author draw from his/her study of the issue or problem?

(1995, 2007 Daniel Kies. Document URL: <http://papyr.com/hypertextbooks/comp2/abstract.htm>)

**Second definition:** A typical abstract contains the **IMRAD** format.

**Introduction** – the background to the study which discusses what is known and unknown about the topic. It justifies the reason for the study. (*What the author did*).

**Method** – outlines simplistically who the study groups and population are, how the data was collected, the duration and time period of the study and any other relevant factors in the data collection. (*How the author did it*).

**Results** – the results importantly display the basic findings of the study, including statistical values such as probability. (*What the author found*).

**Discussion** – summarises the findings and relevance of the study – why the work was important. (*What the author concluded*).

Adapted from: (Grech, V. WASP (Write a Scientific Paper): Preparing an Abstract.)

Abstracts are written for the purpose of succinctly summarizing the main points of any text as objectively as possible, without copying the language of the original. There are two types of abstracts: descriptive and informative.

**Descriptive** abstracts include information about the purpose, scope, and methods used to arrive at the findings contained in the original document. A descriptive abstract need not be longer than several sentences if it adequately summarizes the information.

The **informative** abstract is an expanded version of the descriptive abstract. In addition to information about the purpose, scope, and methods used, the informative abstract includes the results, conclusions, and recommendations.

([http://www.grantadesign.com/download/pdf/How\\_to\\_write\\_a\\_paper\\_6th\\_edition\\_2005.pdf](http://www.grantadesign.com/download/pdf/How_to_write_a_paper_6th_edition_2005.pdf))

<b>Abstracts are usually written in tightly worded sentences which</b>	
<p><b>prefer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ past tense</li> <li>▶ third person passive</li> <li>▶ uses phrases instead of clauses</li> <li>▶ uses words instead of phrases</li> </ul>	<p><b>avoid:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ negatives</li> <li>▶ subordinate clauses</li> <li>▶ abbreviations, jargon, symbols and other language shortcuts which might lead to confusion</li> <li>▶ repetition and meaningless expressions</li> <li>▶ superlatives, adjectives, illustrations, descriptive details, examples, footnotes.</li> </ul>
<b>in short: Abstracts eliminate redundancy.</b>	

(Adapted from: Graetz (1985) in Swales, J.M. (1990): Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings.)

Abstracts are not long — only about a paragraph, with 250 words being a common word count for them. In many cases if this word count is exceeded then the abstract may be ignored (eg when seeking publication or conference inclusion – so very important to know and keep to the word count.

Many writers find that they can combine several of the sentences of the abstract when the ideas are closely related. At the beginning of an essay, abstracts allow you to introduce your subject to your readers before you go into your analysis in detail.

### 1.3. Read the abstract and identify its parts:

**\* Work with a partner to identify the different parts of the abstract below. What information does each sentence convey to the reader?**

(1) This paper seeks to analyze the quantity and quality of American newspaper coverage of Canada, its people, and Canadian happenings. (2) The study monitored five American newspapers (four local, one national) for content relevant to the topic of Canada. (3) The research period lasted two months, from 15 May 2004 to 15 July 2004 (so as to include the Canadian election). (4) The study seeks to identify the different topics covered by the papers, looking particularly at regional variations in the types of stories covered. (5) Articles were organized into seven different groupings: news and happenings, politics, cultural and social issues, health care, sports, the environment, and business. (6) At this point, a detailed analysis was conducted to determine not only the number of articles included in each category, but also the most common issues and themes presented in the coverage, as well as the source of the article (newswire, local author, or editorial). (7) Such analysis provides a profile of how Canada is covered in several regional markets within the United States. (8) The study finds significant regional variations in coverage of Canada. (9) Analysis of newspaper content provides a good sense of how

Canada and Canadian culture are perceived in various regional markets across the United States, particularly in regions in which a person's main source of information about Canada is the print media.

(Adapted from: Christopher M. Belch; A View from Abroad: An Analysis of Canadian Coverage in U.S. Newspapers, [http://sitemaker.umich.edu/cbelch/thesis\\_abstract](http://sitemaker.umich.edu/cbelch/thesis_abstract))

<b>Sentence: 1)</b>	<b>2)</b>	<b>3)</b>
<b>4)</b>	<b>5)</b>	<b>6)</b>
<b>7)</b>	<b>8)</b>	<b>9)</b>

#### **1.4. Characteristics of a good abstract**

*Read the following characteristics. Decide which you think an abstract must have to be effective.*

***\*Write down your ideas with a partner then discuss with the class group.***

- a) The same order of facts and ideas as the original
- b) Similar wording to the original with occasional phrases exactly the same
- c) Additional information which the original writer omitted, but which help to understand the subject
- d) A personal comment on the subject
- e) Simpler vocabulary than the original
- f) Key points of the original
- g) References to figures, tables, or sources
- h) No more than 20% of the total length of the source
- i) Use of the first person singular

## 2. PARAGRAPH

2.1. What is a paragraph? What is its function? \* **Discuss with the group**

### 2.2. Features of a paragraph

\* **Look at the paragraph features below and discuss with a partner what they mean:**

▶ cohesion:

▶ development:

▶ direct structure:

▶ length:

Example of paragraph structure: \* **Read through with the class group**

Topic sentence (expressing the “problem”) →	<b>The emphasis of the criminal justice system has until recently been on the battle between the offender/defendant and the state/prosecutor and not the actual harm experienced by the victim. <i>In Fact victims have had minimal participation in the criminal justice process; their role being primarily to provide information to the state prosecutor with no involvement in prosecution and sentencing.</i> McShane and Williams (1992, p. 260) contend that “victim neglect is not simply a result of indifference, it is a logical extension of a legal system which defines crime as an offence against the state”. <u>They argue that this neglect can be remedied by training of personnel within the criminal justice system and through victim support services.</u></b>
Expansion of point →	
Evidence/ support →	
<u>Closing sentence</u> (e.g. solution) →	

(Adapted from Alison Brown, 2007)

### 2.3. Topic sentence exercise

Choose the best among the four possible topic sentences for each paragraph below.

**\* Work with a partner to find the answers, then discuss with the group.**

A)

1. There are two broad theories concerning what triggers a human's inevitable decline to death.
2. Some scientists believe humans contain an "internal time clock" which forces them eventually to die.
3. We all must die some day.
4. My biology professor gave an interesting lecture Thursday.

A) \_\_\_\_\_

The first is the wear-and-tear hypothesis that suggests the body eventually succumbs to the environmental insults of life. The second is the notion that we have an internal clock which is genetically programmed to run down. Supporters of the wear-and-tear theory maintain that the very practice of breathing causes us to age because inhaled oxygen produces toxic by-products. Advocates of the internal clock theory believe that individual cells are told to stop dividing and thus eventually to die by, for example, hormones produced by the brain or by their own genes.

B)

1. Soldiers need discipline.
2. We commonly look on the discipline of war as vastly more rigid than any discipline necessary in time of peace, but this is an error.
3. Although soldiers are not always disciplined, they serve an important social function in wartime.
4. In times of peace, soldiers often convert easily from wartime pursuits to the discipline necessary successfully to compete in even the most competitive marketplace.

B) \_\_\_\_\_

The strictest military discipline imaginable is still looser than that prevailing in the average assembly-line. The soldier, at worst, is still able to exercise the highest conceivable functions of freedom -- that is, he or she is permitted to steal and to kill. No discipline prevailing in peace gives him or her anything remotely resembling this. The soldier is, in war, in the position of a free adult; in peace he or she is almost always in the position of a child. In war all things are excused by success, even violations of discipline. In peace, speaking generally, success is inconceivable except as a function of discipline.

(Adapted from: from Blank, D.: "The Eternal Quest"; Mencken, H.L.: "Reflections on War" in: <http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/rvtopic.html> )

### 2.4. Closing sentence exercise

Choose the best among the four possible closing sentences for each paragraph below.

**\* Work with a partner to find the answers, then discuss with the group.**

Possible closing sentences:

1. Thus, in order to ensure their survival, it is essential for the arts to be subsidised.
2. If he had been subsidised, Mozart would not have been so poor.
3. When the arts have to make money, they are no longer fulfilling their true purpose, but instead become a branch of commerce.

When it comes to the arts, there is a clear case for subsidy. The arts have nothing to do with making money. They exist in order to express certain essential truths about human beings by means of new kinds of poetry, music, painting, and so on. However, these new kinds of art may not be popular, and thus there may be little support by the general public for them, and so artists cannot rely on selling their work to provide them with an income. In fact, history shows that many artists have not been properly appreciated while they were alive. For example, Mozart, whose works are so popular nowadays, lived close to poverty for most of his life.

(Adapted from: Waters,M., Waters,A.: 1995, p.110.)

## 2.5. Development

*A paragraph has to have enough information in it to justify being a paragraph! It should consist of a main point that is then further elaborated on. Discuss what some possible development models can be.*

**\* In what different ways can a paragraph be developed?**

**\* Discuss with the class group**

**\* Now look at the following example – what type of paragraph development is used here?**

Example:

<p><b>Topic sentence -main idea</b></p> <p><i>Expansion of point(italic)</i></p> <p><u>Comment</u></p>	<p>The research on anxiety suggests that <b>like self-esteem, anxiety can be experienced at various levels</b> (Oxford 1999). <i>At the deepest or global level, <b>trait</b> anxiety is a more permanent predisposition to be anxious. Some people are predictably and generally anxious about many things. At a more momentary, or situational level, <b>state</b> anxiety is experienced in relation to some particular event or act.</i></p> <p><u>As we learned in the case of self-esteem, then, it is important in a classroom for a teacher to try to determine whether a student's anxiety stems from a more global trait or whether it comes from a particular situation at the moment.</u></p>
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(Adapted from Alison Brown, 2007; Source: Brown, H.D (2000)

## 2.6. Cohesion within paragraphs

Text cohesion is the way the writing holds together, to make sense. Each sentence should relate to the other sentences in the paragraph. What cohesive devices that assist in creating text cohesion can you think of?

(Adapted from Alison Brown, 2007)

**\* Discuss with a partner, then with the class group**

## 2.7. Which is the more cohesive paragraph?

Look at the two following paragraphs and decide which of them has a better overall plan. Support your opinion with evidence.

**\* Read and discuss with a partner, then with the class group**

**A)**

The ancient Egyptians were masters of preserving dead people's bodies by making mummies of them. Mummies several thousand years old have been discovered nearly intact. The skin, hair, teeth, finger- and toenails, and facial features of the mummies were evident. It is possible to diagnose the diseases they suffered in life such as smallpox, arthritis, and nutritional deficiencies. The process was remarkably effective. Sometimes apparent were the fatal afflictions of the dead people: a middle-aged king died from a blow on the head, and polio killed a child king. Mummification consisted of removing the internal organs, applying natural preservatives inside and out, and then wrapping the body in layers of bandages.

**B)**

The ancient Egyptians were masters of preserving dead people's bodies by making mummies of them. The process of mummification consisted of removing the internal organs, applying natural preservatives inside and out, and then wrapping the body in layers of bandages. It was a remarkably effective practice. Indeed, mummies several thousand years old have been discovered nearly intact. Their skin, hair, teeth, fingers and toenails, and facial features of the mummies are still evident. Their diseases in life, such as smallpox, arthritis, and nutritional deficiencies, are still diagnosable. Even their fatal afflictions are still apparent: a middle-aged king died from a blow on the head: a child king died from polio.

(Adapted from: Alison Brown, 2007; Fowler, Aaron & Anderson: 2001, pp. 81-2)



### ***Homework and Final Assignment***

Prepare a written text of 1000 – 2000 words.

Choose a topic that is most relevant for you and your research work.

The type of text can be anything you would find useful to have feedback on and could include: a research proposal, scientific article or a section of one (eg introduction and literature review, discussion and conclusions, abstract plus another section...etc) section of a thesis, etc.

Deadline for completion: 19th December. Please give hard copy or email to Alex Floyd by this date.