



Writing a great article

Writing an abstract

Posted 09 May 2017 - 09:25

How to write an abstract that will summarise your article and act as a reader's guide to the article ahead.

If you are writing an article that you want to appear in the evidence and practice section of an RCNi journal, you'll need to write an abstract. These may vary slightly in style and content but essentially an abstract is a summary. It is not an introduction; nor is it the whole article with a few sections cut out. So what is its purpose?

Think about the reader

Writing for publication is all about the reader. You, the author, want the reader to journey through your article from start to finish with as few obstacles, forks in the road and dead ends as possible. Think of the abstract as a sort of guide to this journey. It explains what lies ahead, it highlights important features or findings and it describes the end point.

A well written abstract can make the difference between readers reading on your article, and reflecting or acting upon it, and their abandoning the journey before it has begun.

Here are some points to consider when writing an abstract:

- Write the article before the abstract. You cannot summarise what you have not yet written.
- Stick to the guidelines. Abstracts in RCNi journals have between 80 and 150 words. Anything longer is likely to be cut so make every word count.

- Follow the same order in the abstract as you do in the article. But write the abstract separately rather than cutting and pasting chunks of text from the article.
- Describe your article's main arguments and findings broadly. The detail should be in the article itself.
- If you are writing for Nurse Researcher, use the following headings in your abstract: Background, Aim, Discussion, Conclusion, Implications for practice, Keywords (see below). If your article is original research in any other RCNi journal, use these headings in the abstract: Background, Aim, Method, Results, Discussion, Conclusion, Implications for practice, Keywords.
- All abstracts should be followed by a list of five or six keywords. These will help online searchers to find your article once it is published. To choose the keywords, think about the article's subject matter, the setting, the target group of patients or clients, the healthcare professionals involved, the techniques described and so on. For example, a typical set of keywords is: 'depression', 'nursing homes', 'older people', 'community mental health nurses', 'cognitive behavioural therapy'.
- When writing the abstract, think about the article's purpose. Be clear about the issue you are trying to address. Why does the article matter? What does it add to the sum of existing nursing knowledge? How is it likely to influence nursing practice? The abstract should give your audience clear reason to read on.
- Avoid jargon and unexplained acronyms. Of course, this applies to the main text as well but, because the abstract should 'sell' the article to readers, it is especially important not to litter it with words and phrases that confuse and discourage.