

Writing Effective Titles and Abstracts: Making Your Scholarship Stand Out, June 30, 2023

A presentation by Jennifer Campi and Toni Gallo, MA, *Academic Medicine*

Make your scholarship stand out to editors.

State the reason for your paper up front so editors and readers don't have to guess what the purpose of your work is. Be sure your argument or study description are well constructed and organized.

The title and abstract are the first, and sometimes only, parts of your paper that readers will see.

Effective titles are informative, interesting, and as concise as possible. They include key terms to optimize searches and represent the content of your paper but don't state the results. You want readers to read beyond your title!

Think of the abstract like a menu on a restaurant's website.

You read the menu to decide if you want to eat at the restaurant. An abstract serves the same purpose. It should be a summary of your paper, not an introduction, and help readers decide if they want to read the rest of your paper.

What do editors want?

- Significant, clear rationale
- Novel, interesting idea
- Alignment of purpose with rigorous methodology and data analysis strategy
- Discussion that puts the results or arguments into context
- Likely to be cited
- A good fit for the journal / publication
- Well written — Work is presented clearly and accurately

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Effective titles

- Informative
- Interesting
- Not too wordy
- Represent the article
- Include key search terms
- Limit use of acronyms

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When writing an abstract ...

- Remember it's not an introduction
- Match the abstract to the main text (data, details, ideas)
- Include key information in the abstract AND the main text
- Feel free to borrow language (phrases, sentences) from the main text
- Make sure someone who sees only the abstract will have a good understanding of the article's main messages / findings

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Additional Resources and Recommendations

- **Remember that you're telling a story, even if you're reporting research.** Think about the purpose of your work and the story you want to tell. For more on this idea of telling a story with your research, check out the work of Lorelai Lingard and Chris Watling. They have strategies you can follow for each section of your paper in their AM Last Page [It's a Story, Not a Study: Writing an Effective Research Paper](#).
- **Read the journals you're thinking of submitting to and become familiar with their article types** and the topics they publish on to determine which article type and publication are the best fit for your work. If you're going to submit to *Academic Medicine*, for example, read [recently published articles](#) to get an idea of how your work could fit in. Then, go back to your purpose and the story you want to tell to determine the right format for your work.
- **Before submitting your paper, check the instructions for authors** for any requirements related to that publication and article type, such as word limits and other formatting guidelines. All journals have requirements for their different article types.
- **Check out common reasons that journal submissions are rejected before they're sent to external peer review** to be sure your paper doesn't include any of these flaws. The editors of *Academic Medicine* studied these reasons at their journal and found that a number relate to the writing in the paper and to the paper not being a good fit for *Academic Medicine*. Read more about their study in [Making the First Cut: An Analysis of Academic Medicine's Editors' Reasons for Not Sending Manuscripts Out for External Peer Review](#).

These key moments and helpful resources are from a monthly webinar series hosted by the editorial teams of the AAMC's 2 peer-reviewed journals, Academic Medicine and MedEdPORTAL. Sessions cover the importance of publishing your education scholarship and practical suggestions for how to do so successfully. All are invited to attend. [Learn more about upcoming sessions](#).