

## Anatomy of an Abstract

This is a highly formulaic genre of writing, with six key components. These components shouldn't be very long – perhaps a sentence each, except for point 4. This is where you will put all your extra words, explaining the *what* and *how* of your research (I will look at the body of extant work of Aischylos and apply a modal linguistic analysis).

It consists of the following:

- 1) Big picture: the topic
- 2) Where there's a gap (e.g. why are you doing this research? What's the point?)
- 3) Your project fills the gap!
- 4) The specific things your project examines
- 5) Your own argument
- 6) A strong concluding sentence

Here's what Karen Kelsky of the *Professor is In* ([professorisin.com](http://professorisin.com)) says about writing paper abstracts:

Sentence 1: Big picture topic that is being intensively debated in your field/fields, possibly with reference to scholars ("The question of xxx has been widely debated in xxx field, with scholars such as xxx and xx arguing xxx").

Sentence 2: Gap in the literature on this topic. This GAP IN KNOWLEDGE is very, very bad, and detrimental to the welfare of all right thinking people. This is the key sentence of the abstract. ("However, these works/articles/arguments/perspectives have not adequately addressed the issue of xxxx.").

Sentence 3: Your project fills this gap ("My paper addresses the issue of xx with special attention to xxx").

Sentence 4+ (length here depends on your total word allowance, and more sentences may be possible): The specific material that you are examining—your data, your texts, etc. ("Specifically, in my project, I will be looking at xxx and xxx, in order to show xxxx. I will discuss xx and xx, and juxtapose them against xx and xx, in order to reveal the previously misunderstood connections between xx and xx.")

Sentence 5: Your main argument and contribution, concisely and clearly stated. ("I argue that...")

Sentence 6: Strong Conclusion! ("In conclusion, this project, by closely examining xxxxx, sheds new light on the neglected/little recognized/rarely acknowledged issue of xxxxx. ").