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starting strong



Unpacking the introductory sections of your abstract

background - A brief introduction of what is already known or is common practice about the focus area of your presentation.

Stormwater is a relatively narrow field. As such, the conference organisers who review the abstracts and the conference audience will not require more than 2-3 sentences to understand your area of research or your case study.

aim - Why are you doing this? What are you examining? What does the paper seek to present?

This is where your writing can make a difference between getting your abstract accepted and having a well attended session, or not. So be clear when the call for papers comes which session you are aiming for. Make it clear why your paper is important. Write in the Active voice.



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starting strong

Unpacking the introductory sections of your abstract

Often technical writers use the **passive voice**, because it seems more formal. The passive often reduces clarity and adds additional words.

Active writing allows for the important points of the research to stand out, which means our brains can easily get excited about the research without trying to digest where it is all going.

"Previous studies have established, that globally the number of frogs is on the decline. Frogs breathe through their skin and are a good indicator species showing the potential long-term effects of toxins in our environment. In our study, we investigated the effects of urban road runoff on the fertility of frogs."



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professional real estate




The middle sections of your abstract

methodology - Briefly summarise the design or key techniques. In a case study the location and environment are important pieces of information. Statistical studies should mention sample sizes, groupings and duration.

Excessive detail here will weigh down the abstract.

results - The results subsection is the most important part of your abstract. People reading your abstract learn about your findings here. The results section should be the longest part of your abstract. **This is where you should go into detail.**

The call for abstracts is months before the paper is due. As such, your data analysis may not be complete, or your project may not be finished. Don't panic. Include your preliminary findings or project notes, and what you expect the outcome to be based on the preliminary findings.






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professional real estate

The middle sections of your abstract


Often technical writers use too many technical words here. Save the technical words for the paper. When writing an abstract for a conference the conference organisers want to know you have the potential to be an engaging presenter. Technical words that need to be explained can reduce clarity and eat into your word count. A conference abstract should evoke the excitement in the reader that drove you to do the work.

"We examined two populations of European pond frogs over a period of two years. Habitat one, is a natural pond, located in a forest, 3 km from and roadway. Habitat two, is a stormwater pond used to treat roadway runoff. The average body weight of the frogs in the natural pond was greater than that of the frogs in the urban pond (20.4±0.3 g vs. 8.4±0.6 g). In frogs, body weight has a direct correlation to fertility and juvenile mortality. Our initial findings show that the population of frogs in the urban pond is declining over time while the population within the forest pond has increased"



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conclusions *just the facts*




conclusions - The last two sentences of your abstract is the takeaway from your study or project. It should also include the applicability of your work to the stormwater practitioner.

Abstracts should always contain conclusions. An abstract is not the introductory section of a murder mystery. Conference attendees decide whether or not to attend a talk based on what is in the abstract.

Make sure your conclusions are straight forward and to the point. Do not over elaborate on what it all means. Save elaboration for the discussion section of the paper and the presentation.


"Our study revealed that frog populations subject to the road runoff decline over time. As frogs are an indicator species the results suggest road runoff has substantial long term the detrimental effects to the environment."



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END OF PART 1

NEXT: PART 2 TESTING AND PERFECTING YOUR ABSTRACT



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PART 2 TESTING AND PERFECTING YOUR ABSTRACT



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finding the words

*From: Archana Chaudhary, MSc, Aerospace Engineering,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

purpose	verbs
To show analysis	analyse, appraise, define, diagnose, explore, identify, investigate, observe
To summarize	assess, conclude, feature, highlight
To indicate control (to be stable or to maintain at a level)	constrain, control, govern, influence, inhibit, limit, maintain, prohibit, regulate, secure
To discuss findings	attest, confirm, contend, demonstrate, document, indicate, reveal
To state	comment, convey, elaborate, establish, identify, propose
To show increase	advance, development, enlarge, exceed, extend, facilitate, improve, increment, maximize
To show decrease	alleviate, cease, decline, depress, descent, deteriorate, minimize, subsidize, reduce
To show change	alter, accommodate, difference, evolve, fluctuate, generate, transform, transition, vary
To indicate information in a figure	depict, display, illustrate, portray, reveal
To indicate information in a table	classify, enumerate, gives, lists, presents, summarizes
To stress that a task has been performed in-depth	adequately, comprehensively, exhaustively, extensively, thoroughly
To show parts	comprises, compose of, constitutes, encompasses, includes, incorporates
To indicate negative stand	challenge, contradict, disagree, dispute, reject, question
To indicate positive stand	confirm, compliment, corroborate, substantiate, support, uphold, validate, verify
To show approximation	approximate, estimate, resemble, predict



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language to avoid



demonstratives
This, These, Those

Demonstratives are imprecise and often can be replaced with 'the.'
Use demonstratives sparingly.



informal verbs
Very, Quickly

Something is, or is not, good, bad, or obvious. If you feel you must, then use 'substantially'.
Quickly, is less of a crime but 'rapidly' always reads and sounds better.



contractions
Isn't, Won't, Don't

Contractions may help you with your word count, but contractions are too informal for an abstract.



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general advice



- Give your abstract to a strong writer outside your field. Consider the person who writes the copy for your firm's website or if you are at university walk it over to the English department. Your abstract should be able to be read by anyone.
- Give your abstract to a variety of people and peers to read. You can only review your abstract so many times until you start to not see your own errors. Everyone will pick up something different.
- Edit your abstract as if each word you include is costing you a dollar.





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final advice

Write about what you are **passionate** about. Every single one of us in engineering are here because we are passionate about the work we do. If you get rejected, submit another abstract for another conference.

Clay Anderson's application for NASA's astronaut training program was rejected 15 times... he spent 167 days in space.



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Linda Norman, ACH Consulting
Writing your conference abstract



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