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Abstract

Cheryl Iverson

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In this age of electronic data dissemination and retrieval, in which abstracts are typically indexed and freely available, a well-written abstract has become increasingly important in directing readers to articles of potential clinical and research interest. The abstract of a research report summarizes the main points of an article: (1) the study objective or background, (2) the study design and methods, (3) primary results, and (4) principal conclusions. For scientific studies and systematic reviews, narrative expressions, such as “X is described,” “Y is discussed,” “Z is also reviewed,” do not add meaning and should be avoided. Results should be presented

Structured Abstracts

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UPDATE: We will discontinue using quotation marks to identify parts of an article, but retain the capitalization; eg, This is discussed in the Methods section (not the “Methods” section). This change was made February 14, 2013. For reports of original data, systematic reviews (including meta-analyses), and clinical reviews, structured abstracts that use predetermined sideheads are recommended. Specific advice taken from JAMA’s Instructions for Authors, adapted from Haynes et al, is given below. Note that Design, Setting, and Patients or Other Participants may be combined depending on the description. If no intervention was performed, that sideheading may be omitted. Many journals

Unstructured Abstracts

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For other major manuscripts, include a conventional unstructured abstract of no more than 150 words. Abstracts are not required for opinion pieces, letters, and special features such as news articles. Consult the journal's instructions for authors for special requirements in individual publications. |

General Guidelines

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A few specific guidelines to consider in preparing either type of abstract follow: # Consult the journal's instructions for authors. # Follow the journal's specific sideheadings when preparing a structured abstract. # Do not begin the abstract by repeating the title. # Do not cite references. # Provide absolute results for main outcome measures (eg, report incidence rates rather than reporting only relative risks). In addition, provide confidence intervals whenever possible (if not, provide P values) (see , Study Design and Statistics, The Manuscript: Presenting Study Design, Rationale, and Statistical Analysis). # Include major terms and describe databases and study

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