

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

Writing Abstracts and Keywords

WHY WRITE ABSTRACTS AND KEYWORDS?

Abstracts are a short and concise description of your book or chapter. They are different than blurbs or marketing copy because they are targeted for finding content rather than selling content. They provide a reader with a brief, informative guide to your work for online research. Authors of journal articles, especially in the science and medical fields, have provided abstracts for many years.

Keywords are important terms that can be found in your abstract and chapters, but they also stand alone as search terms.

Abstracts and keywords together help researchers find content. Electronic search engines and databases use words found in your title, subtitle, and abstract as well as keywords to choose what content to display to interested readers. Think of abstracts and keywords as helping your book and its chapters become more visible in the online environment. Titles and abstracts are usually the elements of a journal article or book that are freely available online. An informative abstract includes the information that can be found in a descriptive abstract (purpose, methods, scope), and it incorporates the conclusions of the research and the viewpoints of the author.

BOOK ABSTRACT

The book abstract should be concise, 5–10 sentences, and no more than 250 words. Abstracts provide a clear idea of the main arguments and findings of your book. Think about what your research does, how it does it, what resources you draw on, and what your conclusion is. Avoid the personal pronoun and use instead an impersonal voice: for example, “The book discusses . . .” Don’t include references to other published works or to chapters, page numbers, illustrations, or tables within your book.

BOOK KEYWORDS

Provide 5–7 keywords that can be used to describe the content of your book and that enable the full text of the book to be searched online. These terms are similar to search terms in an index. Consider what search terms would be most useful to readers in locating your book. Keep keywords to one or two words rather than a phrase, if possible, and be specific. Because the words in the title of your book are also used as book keywords, you do not have to include them in your list of book keywords. Book keywords should appear in your book abstract.

CHAPTER ABSTRACTS

Each chapter, including the introduction and conclusion, in your book needs a separate abstract. Begin each chapter abstract with the chapter number and chapter title as your heading. Each chapter abstract should be concise, 3–5 sentences, and no more than 150 words (excluding the chapter number and title). Avoid personal pronouns and use the impersonal voice: for example, “This chapter explores . . .” is better than “In this chapter, I explore . . .”

CHAPTER KEYWORDS

Provide 3–5 keywords for each chapter. These keywords will enable the chapter’s content to be successfully searched online. These terms are similar to search terms in an index. Keep keywords to one or two words rather than a phrase, if possible, and specific to the chapter. Because the words in the title of your chapter are also used as keywords, you do not have to include them in your list of chapter keywords.

STYLE GUIDELINES FOR ABSTRACTS

- Capture the essence of the book or chapter in the first sentence
- Limit each abstract to a single paragraph that identifies the content it is describing
- Do not use personal pronouns or your name when referring to your book
- Only use abbreviations or acronyms if they are understood by a wide audience
- Summarize the content, rather than “sell” it
- Include your keywords in your abstract

STYLE GUIDELINES FOR KEYWORDS

- Keep each keyword short (one word, two to three words if they are specialized terms)
- Use lowercase unless the keyword is a proper noun
- Use roman type only, no italic
- Ensure keywords for names appear as Frank Ryan, not Ryan, Frank
- Be as specific as possible
- Use variants as separate keywords as necessary, e.g., “NSA” and “National Security Agency”