

Writing an Abstract – Overview and Basic Guidelines

What is an abstract?

An abstract is a short, concise summary of a longer work (like a research paper, thesis, or article) that quickly tells readers the purpose, methods, key findings, and conclusions, helping them decide if the full text is relevant to their needs.

Abstracts are a usually required part of graduate theses and dissertations. Abstracts are also common in academic and scholarly journal articles, as well as in conference presentations and publications of proceedings.

Try to imagine yourself in the shoes of a reader who is not familiar with your work, and who might be reading the abstract to decide on the importance and relevance of your research.

Writing an abstract?

A common type of abstract is informative. Such an abstract is usually about 200-250 words in length. It is usually composed after the conclusion of the writing of the work and acts as a concise summary of the work (research essay) itself.

Generally speaking, an informative abstract should include at least the following elements:

- 1) an overall description of the topic explored
- 2) the **theoretical**, historical, or methodological framework used
- 3) an outline of the main argument(s)
- 4) a summary of the conclusion(s)

EXAMPLE ABSTRACT (in relation to research question/thesis)

Research Question: How does Louise Bourgeois' sculptural practice engage with psychoanalytic themes of self and trauma?

Thesis Statement: Bourgeois' *Cells* series visualises the unconscious and explores the tensions between memory, identity, and trauma.

Abstract

This essay examines Louise Bourgeois' *Cells* series through Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic frameworks to explore how sculptural practice can articulate experiences of trauma, memory, and fractured selfhood. Bourgeois' *Cells* function as spatialised representations of the unconscious, staging enclosed environments that evoke both psychic interiors and sites of emotional containment. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's theories of repression and repetition, the analysis considers how recurring motifs - such as cages, bodily fragments, and domestic objects - externalise unresolved trauma and compulsive memory. The essay further engages Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror stage to examine the instability of identity within the *Cells*, where fragmented bodies and obstructed viewpoints disrupt any coherent sense of self-recognition. Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection provides an additional lens through which to read the unsettling materiality of the works, particularly their capacity to blur boundaries between subject and object, interior and exterior. Collectively, these psychoanalytic perspectives reveal how Bourgeois' sculptural environments resist narrative closure, instead staging trauma as an ongoing, affective process. Ultimately, the essay argues that the *Cells* operate as psychological architectures that mediate between personal memory and broader human experience, offering a visceral encounter with the complexities of identity formation, vulnerability, and the persistence of the unconscious.