

A Guide to Writing Abstracts for Chemistry Seminars:

A scientific abstract is a short description of a research effort. Abstracts are written and published for oral presentations (including seminars and poster sessions), as well as for full-length journal articles. Abstracts written for the Chemistry Department's Undergraduate Research course should be in the form used ordinarily by chemists for these purposes.

Most of your abstract should summarize the methods, results, and conclusions of your work. An abstract is not an introduction to the material you will present. Introduction of your topic, discussion of previous work, and explanation of why the subject is interesting or important should form only a small part of your abstract.

The purpose of a seminar abstract is to allow a person who might attend to find out the nature and scope of the information that will be presented. The abstract must contain enough information to allow someone to decide whether to attend the seminar (assuming the person has a choice). The abstract is not a substitute for the presentation itself, but it must be complete enough to appear in a meeting program.

In the abstract you should briefly state the problem or the purpose of the research (when that information is not contained in the title). After this statement, you should indicate the experimental plan and methods used, summarize the principal results, and point out major conclusions.

The abstract should be concisely written and self-contained. The length could be two sentences, or it could be many more, depending on the subject matter and the length of the presentation. About a half of a page is an ideal size for undergraduate seminar

DO:

- Describe your research (experimental methods, observations, results, conclusions) in the abstract. Tell what you did, what you found out, and why. (Examples: "Reaction products were identified using infrared spectroscopy," "Because rearrangement was observed in several cases, it is probable that the reaction involves a carbocation intermediate.").
- Use nomenclature that is unambiguous and that will make sense to your listeners. Use standard systematic nomenclature for compounds that are not well known outside your research group, and use common or trivial names only for compounds that are very well known (for example, acetone). **Define** abbreviations and acronyms when they are first used in the abstract (this way: "polyethylene glycol, PEG").

DONT:

- Do not describe your presentation in your abstract. Do not refer to references, tables, figures, or parts of the presentation that are not part of the abstract itself. Don't tell people what you will say (that is, don't write things like "A reaction mechanism will be presented.").
- Do not give details of experimental procedures in your abstract. (Example: Don't write things like "Benzic acid (400 mg) was placed in an Erlenmeyer flask and sufficient ethanol was added to dissolve it.")
- If you use abbreviations and acronyms at all, use them sparingly, and only when necessary to prevent awkward construction or needless repetition.

Adapted from The ACS Style Guide: Dodds, J. S., Ed.; American Chemical Society, Washington, D.C., 1986.

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