

# The abstract

Optional content for projects involving just the collection of secondary data or an artefact. Required content for projects involving primary data.

An abstract is a succinct summary of a piece of research used at the beginning of articles in academic journals to give a quick summary of the report. It should provide the reader with a clear understanding

of the aim, background research, conclusions and the implications of the findings. Method and findings should be included where primary data has been collected, and the method will be relevant in projects involving an artefact.

## Word count

The intention is to give a very brief overview – so keep this brief. Probably about 150–250 words.

There is a good example in the Appendix, Exemplar III page 117.

## Guidelines for the abstract

There should be no subheadings in an abstract and it is usually one or two paragraphs long.

The succinct nature of the abstract is quite a challenge so we will look at how other EPQ students have managed it in the examples on the facing page.

## First or last?

The abstract appears at the beginning of the REPORT but it is often wise to leave its preparation to last so you know what has gone into each of these elements.

Alternatively, it can be useful to write the abstract earlier on, as an aid to identifying the crucial main thread of your research, its purpose, and its findings, which could then guide the structure of the EPQ.

## A planner for your abstract

### HARRY'S EPQ ON CANNABIS USE

You can use this grid to write your own abstract – but remember not to include the subheadings in your final draft.

Aim and/or hypothesis	The abstract should begin with what you intend to research. This can be stated as an aim, for example 'In this project I aim to...investigate the impact of cannabis usage on young people'. Or you may state a hypothesis, for example 'There is correlation between age and cannabis use'.
Relevant background literature	Present a very brief overview of how your topic relates to previous research in the field. For example 'Research suggests that cannabis use in teenagers can have long-term effects on the mind and body' (Zhang <i>et al.</i> 1999). Might be good to give an example as well in a project that is just secondary sources (i.e. no research study).
Method	Describe the method you will use to investigate your topic. If you are using secondary data you might say 'My research used a variety of materials such as books and journal articles and official statistics'. If you are using primary data you might say 'I also collected primary data from an opportunity sample of sixth formers to investigate whether teenagers understood the risks associated with cannabis use'.
Findings	Provide the results of your investigation, if appropriate. If descriptive statistics are used you might say 'The graphs indicate that more young adults aged 24–29 are using cannabis on a regular basis than any other age group'. If inferential statistics have been used state whether results were significant (see page 84). For example, 'A test of correlation showed that there was a significant negative correlation between age and cannabis use ( $p=0.449$ )'.
Conclusion (relate to background research)	It is important that you relate your conclusions to the background research you have discussed in your introduction. Does it support or challenge it? For example, 'From a literature review it is rational to conclude that cannabis has a large impact on the health and well being of young people if taken in excess'.
Implications (relate to findings)	Finally you need to provide a brief statement of what your results mean beyond this study. Do the findings have any real world implications? For example, 'This study shows that existing drug awareness campaigns are not getting the message across to all teenagers about the risks of cannabis and different strategies need to be employed. This suggests that current campaigns are not working'.

EPQ title: Will the Yellowstone Caldera erupt in our lifetime and, if so, what are the consequences?

#### Abstract

The project examines whether the Yellowstone Caldera is likely to erupt in our lifetime and what the impacts of such an eruption would be on the planet. I hope to examine previous eruptions and analyse their effects on civilisation at the time. I will use secondary research and data to collect information, such as peer-reviewed articles, and also websites, such as the USGS or the Geographical Society.

The findings that the Huckleberry Ridge Tuff was created over two or three eruptions separated by around 6000 years leads me to conclude that the possible impact of the eruption of Yellowstone is likely to be less dramatic than eruption of Toba 74,000 years ago. The discovery that there are also less quantities of sulphurous gases in the magma encased beneath Yellowstone also helps me to determine that the prediction of a global cooling and dimming of the Earth for a period of several years will not be as severe as once predicted. Although there would be major losses and devastation to agriculture and the civilisation of the United States, the eruption will most likely not produce a major population bottleneck or extinction as the technological advances of the human race allow planning to be undertaken to mitigate the effects of such an eruption.

#### JENNY'S EPQ ON YELLOWSTONE

#### Moderator comments

A concise abstract of about 200 words that provides the aim and method in brief. The findings could have been more detailed. The implications/inclusions are also extensive.

#### Moderator comments

Abstract of 133 words. The aim is clear and the methods and findings are given but no inferential statistics are presented which would be useful.

#### COURTNEY'S EPQ ON ADVERTS

EPQ title: Do children's adverts use traditional gender stereotypes?

#### Abstract

This project reports the results of a content analysis of 167 commercials broadcast during children's films which aimed to investigate whether these adverts portrayed traditional gendered expectations of males and females.

Partially replicating the research by Smith (2003) the characters were coded for gender, role within the commercial (major or minor), product type (toys, games, food) and location of the character (home, work, or outdoors).

The findings show that males are more likely to be shown in a major role advertising toys and in a work setting.

Advertisers are continuing to use traditional gender portrayals in adverts aimed at children and are thus perpetuating gendered stereotypes. More pressure needs to be exerted on the media to change the images they use to sell products to children to show real-world sex-typed behaviours.

EPQ title: To what extent do we seek partners of the same levels of attractiveness?

#### Abstract

The matching hypothesis states that people are attracted to members of the opposite sex who are similar in terms of physical attractiveness rather than seeking the most physically attractive mate. This study aims to test this hypothesis by selecting a set of photographs of married couples and asking participants to rate the attractiveness of each of the partners (females rate male photos and males rate female photos). Forty-eight participants from the sixth form at our school took part (24 girls and 24 boys) and were asked to rate the physical attractiveness on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 = highly attractive). The correlation was not significant ( $p = 0.05$ , critical value = 0.65, observed value = 0.44, null hypothesis accepted). This suggests that, when looking for a partner, people do not try to match their own physical attractiveness; they may be influenced by a variety of other factors.

#### JUSTIN'S EPQ ON ATTRACTIVENESS

#### Moderator comments

A succinct and well-written abstract of 145 words. Aims and hypothesis are given but no reference to past research. The method is clear and the inferential statistics are reported along with a conclusion but no implications.

## EXERCISE 4.4 Identifying the sections

Read the following abstract and highlight the aim and/or hypothesis, background research, method, results, conclusions with different colours.

The aim of this EPQ was to investigate cultural differences in spider phobia. According to research one of the most common phobias in Western cultures is fear of spiders (Costello 1982). In studies conducted on adult populations in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, the spider was one of the top five most feared animals (Bennett-Levy and Marteau 1984). According to Davey (1994) there may be evolutionary reasons for this fear but the fact that spider phobia is not universal suggests that there may be cultural reasons why spiders are feared. For instance, spider phobia may well be the result of the negative portrayal of spiders in a variety of media, including popular children's stories and modern horror and thriller films such as the US movie *Arachnophobia*.

It was hypothesised that there would be a significant difference in fear ratings, namely the Indian sample would have higher fear ratings overall due to the types of spiders in India being larger and more prone to biting (e.g. jumping, orb). Two groups of participants were selected by means of opportunity sampling. There was one group of 20 UK participants and one group of Indian participants living in India. Both groups were asked to complete a Spider Phobia Questionnaire (SPQ) (Klorman *et al.* 1974). The SPQ is a 31-item self-report instrument that measures fear of spiders. Scores ranged from 0 to 31 with higher scores indicating greater fear. The results of the Mann Whitney U were supported  $p < 0.05$ . The calculated value of Mann Whitney U = 92, critical value of U = 138. It was concluded that spider phobia is a result of cultural differences supporting earlier work by Davey (1994). This has implications for how spiders are portrayed in different cultures.

Suggested answers on page 124.

## EXERCISE 4.5 Abstracts

Read the following abstract and state what is missing:

A laboratory experiment was carried out to investigate if there was a difference in recall rates of neutral and emotional words. This was based on Levinger and Clark's (1961) classic study on the role of emotion.

The investigation used an opportunity sample of 15 participants and a repeated measures design was used. This is because participants were given both the emotional and neutral words and then immediately asked to recall them. The alternative hypothesis predicted that more neutral words would be recalled than emotional words. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test was performed to establish a statistically significant difference.

Suggested answers on page 124.