



Documentation — Abstracts for publications and documentation

Documentation — Analyse pour les publications et la documentation

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FOREWORD

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards institutes (ISO Member Bodies). The work of developing International Standards is carried out through ISO Technical Committees. Every Member Body interested in a subject for which a Technical Committee has been set up has the right to be represented on that Committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work.

Draft International Standards adopted by the Technical Committees are circulated to the Member Bodies for approval before their acceptance as International Standards by the ISO Council.

International Standard ISO 214 was drawn up by Technical Committee ISO/TC 46, *Documentation*, and circulated to the Member Bodies in May 1974.

It has been approved by the Member Bodies of the following countries :

Australia	India	Spain
Austria	Iran	Sweden
Belgium	Ireland	Switzerland
Brazil	Israel	Thailand
Bulgaria	Italy	United Kingdom
Canada	Netherlands	U.S.A.
Finland	Poland	U.S.S.R.
France	Portugal	Yugoslavia
Germany	Romania	
Hungary	South Africa, Rep. of	

No Member Body expressed disapproval of the document.

This International Standard cancels and replaces ISO Recommendation R 214-1961, of which it constitutes a technical revision.

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Documentation — Abstracts for publications and documentation

0 INTRODUCTION

The growing volume of scholarly, scientific, technical, and other informational and instructional documents makes it increasingly important that the basic content of each document be quickly and accurately identifiable both by readers of the primary literature and by users of secondary services. This ready identification is aided if the author of a primary document (aided by editors) begins it with a meaningful title and a well-prepared abstract.

1 SCOPE AND FIELD OF APPLICATION

This International Standard presents guidelines for the preparation and presentation of abstracts of documents. Emphasis is placed on the abstracts prepared by the authors of primary documents, and on their publication, because such abstracts can be both helpful to the readers of these documents and reproducible with little or no change in secondary publications and services. The basic guidelines are also suitable for the preparation of abstracts by persons other than the authors, so specific guidelines are also included for the presentation of abstracts in secondary publications and services.

2 DEFINITIONS

In this International Standard, the term **abstract** signifies an abbreviated, accurate representation of the contents of a document, without added interpretation or criticism¹⁾ and without distinction as to who wrote the abstract.²⁾

An abstract should be as **informative** as is permitted by the type and style of the document; that is, it should present as much as possible of the quantitative and/or qualitative information contained in the document.³⁾ Informative abstracts are especially desirable for texts describing experimental work and documents devoted to a single theme. However, some discursive or lengthy texts, such as broad overviews, review papers, and entire monographs, may permit the preparation of an abstract that is only an **indicative** or descriptive guide to the type of document, the principal subjects covered, and the way the facts are treated. A combined **informative-indicative** abstract must often be prepared when limitations on the length of the abstract or the type and style of the document make it necessary to confine informative statements to the primary elements of the document and to relegate other aspects to indicative statements. See examples 1 to 3.

Abstracts should not be confused with related, but distinct, terms: annotation, extract, and summary. An **annotation** is a brief comment or explanation about a document or its contents, or even a very brief description, usually added as a note after the bibliographic citation of the document. An **extract** is one or more portions of a document selected to represent the whole. A **summary**, if one is needed, is a brief restatement within the document (usually at the end) of its salient findings and conclusions, and is intended to complete the orientation of a reader who has studied the preceding text. (Because other portions of the document, for example purpose, methodology, are not usually condensed into this type of summary, the term should not be used synonymously with “abstract”; i.e. abstract as defined above should not be called a summary, and a summary, if used, should not duplicate — should not take on the full scope of — the abstract.)

1) A brief, critical **review** of a document often takes on much of the character of an informative or informative-indicative abstract, but its writer is expected to include suitable criticism and interpretation.

2) The word **synopsis** was formerly used to denote a résumé prepared by the author, with the term **abstract** restricted to a condensation prepared by some other person. Elimination of this distinction, which has largely disappeared, was one of the reasons for revising ISO/R 214-1961.

3) More-indicative abstracts or even annotations are less expensive to prepare, and may sometimes be all that stringencies in publication economics will permit. However, governing factors such as economics should not be confused with true standards for the quality of abstracts.

3 PURPOSE AND USE OF ABSTRACTS

3.1 Determining relevance

A well-prepared abstract enables readers to identify the basic content of a document quickly and accurately, to determine its relevance to their interests, and thus to decide whether they need to read the document in its entirety.

3.2 Obviating reading full text of fringe documents

Readers for whom the document is of fringe interest often obtain enough information from the abstract to make their reading of the whole document unnecessary.

3.3 Usefulness for computerized full-text searching

Abstracts are also of value in computerized full-text searching for alerting and information retrieval.

3.4 Use in specific primary documents

The following recommendations are for authors and editors of specific documents and publications, such as journals, reports and theses, monographs and proceedings, and patents.

3.4.1 Journals

Include an abstract with every journal article, essay, and discussion. Notes, short communications, editorials, and "letters to the editor" that have substantial technical or scholarly content should also have brief abstracts.

3.4.2 Reports and theses

Include an abstract in every separately published report, pamphlet, or thesis.

3.4.3 Monographs and proceedings

A single abstract may suffice in a book or monograph that deals with a homogeneous subject. However, a separate abstract is also necessary for each chapter if the volume covers different topics or is a collection of papers by different authors (for example, the proceedings of a meeting or symposium). See example 4.

3.4.4 Patents

Each patent or application should be accompanied by an abstract, as required by the rules of the issuing country or international agency.

3.5 Use in secondary publications and services

Secondary publications and services can often make verbatim use of the abstracts provided in primary documents if these abstracts have been carefully prepared

and are free from copyright restrictions. Such authors' abstracts can also provide suitable bases for the secondary service that orients its abstracts to a group of users different from those envisaged by the authors. A completely new abstract usually needs to be written only when brief, subordinated phases of a document are all that fall within the scope of a secondary publication.

3.6 Use on documentation cards

Documentation cards can be conveniently prepared or even separated from the "abstract sheets" of journals and proceedings that include and properly present such pages of abstracts; see ISO 5122, *Documentation — Abstract sheets in serial publications*¹⁾. Also, when documentation cards accompany documents such as reports, these cards should preferably carry the abstracts that these documents contain.

4 TREATMENT OF DOCUMENT CONTENT

Readers in many disciplines have become accustomed to an abstract that states the purpose, methodology, results, and conclusions presented in the original document. Most documents describing experimental work can be analysed according to these elements, but their optimum sequence may depend on the audience for which the abstract is primarily intended. Readers interested in applying new knowledge may gain information more quickly from a findings-oriented arrangement in which the most important results and conclusions are placed first, followed by supporting details, other findings, and methodology. See parts A and B of example 5.

The following rules are optimum for informative abstracts. Writers of informative-indicative and indicative abstracts should follow them to the extent that is practical.

4.1 Purpose

State the primary objectives and scope of the study or the reasons why the document was written unless these are already clear from the title of the document or can be derived from the remainder of the abstract. Refer to earlier literature only if it is an essential part of the purpose.²⁾

4.2 Methodology

Describe techniques or approaches only to the degree necessary for comprehension. Identify new techniques clearly, however, and describe the basic methodological principle, the range of operation, and the obtainable accuracy. For documents concerned with non-experimental work, describe data sources and data manipulation.

1) At present at the stage of draft.

2) In this event, an adequate bibliographic citation should be given within parentheses.