

MASTERING ABSTRACT WRITING IN ACADEMIC ENGLISH



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Preface

Academic writing is not merely a matter of putting words together. It is a process of organizing ideas, constructing meaning, and communicating knowledge in ways that are clear, coherent, and appropriate to an academic community. Among the various forms of academic writing, the thesis abstract occupies a particularly important position. Although relatively brief, an abstract is expected to represent the essential content of a much longer academic work while following recognizable conventions of structure, language, and organization.

This book provides a comprehensive yet accessible discussion of thesis abstract writing, particularly for undergraduate students in English language education. It brings together several aspects that are often discussed separately in academic writing: rhetorical organization, verb tense, coherence, grammatical cohesion, and clause complexes. By bringing these aspects into a unified perspective, the book offers readers a broader understanding of how an effective abstract is constructed

not only through what is communicated, but also through how ideas are organized and linguistically expressed.

The multidimensional perspective offered in this book moves beyond a purely structural approach to abstract writing. Knowing what information an abstract should contain is important, but it is equally important to understand how that information is connected and realized through language. Writers need to consider not only the organization of ideas but also how themes develop, how sentences are connected, how verb tenses support communicative purposes, and how relationships among ideas are expressed through clauses.

Throughout the book, these perspectives are presented in a way that connects conceptual understanding with practical application. Readers are encouraged to examine abstracts critically, recognize common patterns and problems, and use the Multidimensional Thesis Abstract Writing Model as a guide for planning, writing, revising, and evaluating their own abstracts. The model is intended as a flexible framework rather than a rigid formula, allowing writers to make informed choices while

maintaining the essential characteristics of effective academic communication.

The book also recognizes that improving abstract writing is not solely the responsibility of individual students. Effective guidance from lecturers and thesis supervisors plays an important role in helping students understand academic conventions and develop their writing abilities. For this reason, the book extends its practical perspective to the teaching and supervision of abstract writing, offering ideas and tools to support more systematic instruction and feedback.

Ultimately, this book seeks to make thesis abstract writing more understandable, purposeful, and manageable. It invites readers to see an abstract not simply as a formal requirement at the end of a thesis, but as an important form of academic communication that reflects the writer's ability to select, organize, connect, and express knowledge effectively.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the intellectual contributions of scholars whose ideas have enriched the

understanding of genre, academic writing, coherence, cohesion, and language as a resource for meaning-making. Appreciation is also extended to students, lecturers, colleagues, and academic communities whose experiences and perspectives have contributed to the development of ideas presented in this book.

Finally, the authors hope that this book will serve not only as a practical guide but also as an invitation to view academic writing from a broader perspective. Writing an abstract may be a small part of a larger academic work, but it represents a significant act of communication: the ability to select essential information, organize it meaningfully, and express it with clarity and precision. Understanding this multidimensional nature of abstract writing can help writers move beyond simply completing an academic requirement toward becoming more effective participants in scholarly communication.

Semarang, July 2026

Authors

Table Of Contents

.....	i
Preface	i
Table Of Contents	v
Chapter 1. Why Abstract Writing Matters	1
Chapter 2. Learning to Write Academically	10
Chapter 3. What Makes a Good Thesis Abstract	17
Chapter 4. Organizing Ideas Clearly	23
Chapter 5. Choosing the Right Verb Tense	30
Chapter 6. Making Abstracts Easy to Read	36
Chapter 7. Connecting Sentences Smoothly	41
Chapter 8. Writing More with Fewer Words	46
Chapter 9. What Student Abstracts Reveal	52
Chapter 10. A Practical Model for Writing Abstracts: Applying the Multidimensional Abstract Writing Model	61
10.1 Why a Multidimensional Model?	61
10.2 Understanding the Five Dimensions	66
10.3 Writing an Abstract Step by Step	72
10.4 Integrating the Five Moves into a Complete Abstract	77
10.5 Evaluating Your Abstract Using the Multidimensional Model	85
10.6 Common Problems and How to Improve Them ..	91
10.7 Build Your Own Abstract	97

Chapter 11. Teaching Abstract Writing More Effectively	
.....	101
11.1 Why Teaching Abstract Writing Matters	101
11.2 Principles of Effective Abstract Writing Instruction	
.....	105
11.3 Applying the Multidimensional Abstract Writing	
Model in Teaching	116
11.4 Using the Checklist for Supervision	123
11.5 Recommendations for Lecturers, Thesis	
Supervisors, and Institutions	131
Chapter 12. Final Thoughts	137
References	141

Chapter 1. Why Abstract Writing Matters

This chapter introduces the importance of abstract writing and provides a foundation for understanding the role of abstracts in academic communication. Previous discussion by Erzad (2026) highlights the importance of considering both the rhetorical organization and linguistic realization of academic abstracts.

The abstract is often the first part of an academic text that readers examine. Abstracts are essential components of scientific and academic writing because they provide concise summaries of journal articles, academic papers, research proposals, and undergraduate theses. A well-written abstract enables readers to quickly understand the central focus, purpose, approach, and main contribution of a longer academic text. For this reason, the quality of an abstract can influence how readers perceive and engage with the work as a whole.

An abstract is not simply a shortened version of a longer document. It presents a concentrated account of the study's purpose, methodology, and main findings.

Producing such an account requires writers to select information carefully and express it precisely. A well-constructed abstract allows readers from different academic backgrounds to recognize the study's principal contribution without being overwhelmed by technical detail. In this way, the abstract connects specialized research with the broader academic community.

For student writers, especially those working in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, abstract writing is an important measure of academic literacy. Writing an effective abstract involves more than producing grammatically correct sentences. Students must also understand how academic knowledge is structured, presented, and communicated. The quality and persuasive strength of an abstract are crucial for attracting readers and encouraging them to consult the full article. Writers must therefore select suitable rhetorical moves, organize them logically, and maintain coherence within a limited number of words.

Problems in abstract writing often indicate broader weaknesses in genre awareness, information organization,

and control of academic discourse. Such problems should not be viewed merely as isolated linguistic errors. Students may write grammatically acceptable sentences but still fail to explain the study's purpose, findings, or contribution clearly.

Abstracts also have enduring institutional importance. After a thesis or research project is stored in a university repository, its abstract becomes a permanent representation of the work for future students, researchers, and evaluators. A poorly written abstract may prevent readers from recognizing the quality of the research. By contrast, a clear and well-organized abstract can increase the study's visibility and scholarly impact. Abstracts should therefore be regarded as central instruments of academic communication rather than minor or supplementary sections of academic texts.

A recurring weakness in student abstracts is an incomplete or disproportionate rhetorical structure. Many abstracts state the research aim, methodology, and results but leave out other important elements, especially the conclusion. Without a conclusion, readers may not clearly understand

the study's contribution or implications. This structural imbalance suggests that students have limited awareness of the abstract as a distinct genre shaped by established rhetorical conventions.

Verb tense is another frequent source of difficulty. In an effective abstract, grammatical choices should correspond to the purpose of each rhetorical section. However, students often use tense inconsistently. They may describe methods and results in the present tense when the past tense would be more appropriate, while presenting background information as though it referred only to completed actions. Such choices may blur the temporal status of the research and reduce clarity. They also indicate that students may depend more on intuition than on genre-based conventions.

Coherence presents an additional challenge. As reported by Widhiyanto et al. (2023), coherence and cohesion are essential in undergraduate thesis abstracts because they enhance readability, facilitate comprehension, and help readers identify the main ideas. Even when individual sentences are grammatically correct, students may

struggle to connect information smoothly throughout the abstract. Repetition, sudden changes in topic, and insufficient transitions can cause the text to appear fragmented.

Weak theme-rheme progression may further disrupt coherence. Students sometimes introduce new information without clearly connecting it to ideas presented earlier. Because an abstract is brief, even small interruptions in the flow of information can significantly reduce readability and make the argument more difficult to follow.

Students also experience difficulty controlling information density through clause construction. When attempting to compress complex research, they may place several clauses within one sentence without establishing clear grammatical or logical relationships among them. Syntactic patterns transferred from the first language may also influence clause connections, resulting in awkward or ambiguous English sentences. Although syntactic complexity can contribute to conciseness, poorly controlled clause combinations generally obscure

meaning. In line with Mubshirah et al. (2023), excessive or poorly structured sentence complexity can impede readers' understanding.

These recurring difficulties indicate the need for explicit instruction that combines rhetorical organization, linguistic accuracy, and meaning-making. Teaching abstract writing solely through grammar correction or formal formatting requirements is inadequate. Students must also learn how linguistic choices and rhetorical structure interact to achieve specific communicative purposes.

Abstract writing is especially demanding in higher education settings where English is learned as a foreign language. Students are expected to communicate complex research ideas in a language over which they may have limited control while simultaneously following unfamiliar academic conventions. Abstract writing therefore requires the integration of linguistic proficiency, genre knowledge, and disciplinary norms. For many EFL students, it is the first academic task that requires them to manage all these demands at the same time.

Limited exposure to effective abstract models is a significant problem in EFL universities. Many students begin examining abstracts seriously only when they start writing their undergraduate theses. Institutional guidelines may specify word limits and general content requirements, yet they often provide little explanation of the relevant rhetorical and linguistic conventions. In the absence of clear models and explicit instruction, students may depend on intuition or translate directly from their first language.

This approach may result in grammatically acceptable sentences, but it often does not satisfy academic readers' rhetorical expectations. Students may include the required information yet organize it poorly, apply unsuitable tense patterns, or present ideas without a clear communicative sequence.

Linguistic limitations make abstract writing even more challenging. As reported by Nabila (2024), students commonly experience difficulties with grammatical accuracy, abstract structure, and the concise presentation of research findings. Restricted vocabulary, uncertainty

about tense selection, and limited control of complex sentences may prevent them from expressing ideas precisely. Even students who perform well in general English courses may struggle to compress research procedures and findings into concise academic prose.

Differences between first-language and English rhetorical conventions may also shape how students organize information. These differences can result in abstracts that English-speaking readers perceive as repetitive, indirect, or unclear. Such difficulties demonstrate that general language proficiency alone does not necessarily produce effective academic abstract writing.

Despite these challenges, EFL university settings offer valuable opportunities for instruction. Abstract writing can provide an accessible starting point for developing both genre awareness and academic language proficiency. Genre awareness involves understanding how language functions across context, discourse, and linguistic form, and it can be developed through the examination of multiple model texts.

Explicit instruction, scaffolded practice, and carefully selected examples can help students understand the relationship among structure, language, and meaning in academic abstracts. From this perspective, writing an abstract is not merely a requirement for graduation. It is also a meaningful learning activity that strengthens students' broader capacity to participate in academic communication.

Chapter 2. Learning to Write Academically

Academic writing is an acquired competence developed through sustained reading, explicit instruction, purposeful practice, and reflection. General language proficiency is insufficient because scholarly communication also demands precision, formal expression, coherent organization, evidence-based reasoning, and critical engagement with information. Academic writing therefore serves not only as a principal means of assessment in higher education but also as a process through which students develop intellectual competence by analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating knowledge.

Effective academic writing is purposeful and responsive to its intended audience. Writers must construct a clear line of reasoning, organize ideas logically, and support claims with relevant evidence. Consequently, students require explicit guidance in formulating research problems, integrating sources, presenting findings, and following disciplinary conventions. Instruction that concentrates exclusively on grammatical correctness may leave students unable to achieve coherence, communicate

meaning effectively, or fulfill the rhetorical purpose of a text.

Linguistic control remains essential, particularly for novice ESL and EFL writers seeking to meet university-level expectations. Vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, verb tense, and sentence complexity influence the clarity, credibility, and interpretation of academic texts. However, these linguistic features should not be taught separately from meaning. Students must understand how particular language choices perform communicative functions within a scholarly argument. Such understanding develops gradually through engagement with authentic academic texts and critical reflection on writing experience.

The development of academic writing is especially complex in EFL contexts. Differences between English and students' first languages may hinder idea generation, grammatical application, and control of writing mechanics. At the same time, students must acquire linguistic proficiency, genre knowledge, and familiarity with academic conventions, often while completing high-