

Biology 222: Genetics and Molecular Biology

Abstract Writing Assignment

Aho, Pratt, Strand, and Todt (adapted from Bishop)

Due: 1/16 (Pratt, Todt). 1/17 (Aho, Strand) and 1/25 (all sections)

Goal: Learn to summarize in a very concise fashion the methodology and findings of a research article.

Prior to writing:

Review the section in chapter 11 of Ambrose on titles and abstracts. Ambrose has several examples of abstracts that should be useful to you in thinking about what an abstract should accomplish. You may also find it helpful to look back at the abstracts from some of the primary literature you read for Biology 221 (Ecology) last semester.

Writing titles and abstracts:

Titles should be short and describe the factual content of the paper. Be straightforward.

The abstract is a single paragraph, no longer than 250 words, that gives readers enough information to allow them to decide whether reading the entire paper is worth their time or not. It has the format of the whole paper (introduction, materials and methods, results, and conclusion). It should include:

1. Introduction: One to three sentences explaining topic to be addressed and explaining the main question(s) being addressed.
2. Methods: One to three sentences explaining how the investigation was conducted. Don't go into explicit details.
3. Results: One to three sentences explaining the major discoveries you made. Don't include any statistical results.
4. Conclusion: One to two sentences explaining your major conclusions based on your results.

Many biological journals have moved away from using passive voice ("the human hemoglobin gene was cloned") to using active voice ("I (We) have cloned the human hemoglobin gene..."). This helps make the papers easier to read and less awkward to write. While the papers you read won't be your actual work, pretend that you did the study and use active voice when writing the abstract. Be careful not to plagiarize sentences or phrases from the paper you are abstracting.