TIPS FOR AUTHORS

The Last Steps in Manuscript Preparation:
Writing the Structured Abstract and
Listing Index Words
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Writing the structured abstract

More people will read your abstract than any other part of your paper. Many *JP* readers may read *only* the abstracts for some reports. But even more importantly, if your abstract is published, it will appear in **Medline**, the National Library of Medicine's online index to the health sciences literature, where it will be accessible to millions of Medline users throughout the world. Considering this enormous potential readership, the prudent author will take some pains in constructing this element of the research report. Here are some suggestions for composing the structured abstract.

- Write the abstract *after* you have completed the full report. Writing the abstract last makes sense because the structure of the paper and its central points will have evolved to their final form at that point and should be clear in your mind.
- For research papers, organize your abstract under four headings: Purpose, Materials and Methods, Results, and Conclusion. If you are writing a clinical report, topic of interest, or technique article, your abstract should *not* be structured.
- Be clear. Remember those readers who will see *only* the abstract. Consider also the readers who might be interested in your topic but may not continue to the full report if the abstract fails to convey clearly the basic information contained in the report.
- Be accurate. Double-check your report of findings in the abstract. Make sure the data reported in the abstract are consistent with the findings reported in more detail in the body of the paper.
- Finally, despite the wide potential audience, don't forget your first and most crucial readers, the *JP* Editor-in-Chief and the appropriate Section Editor. These individuals will begin their reviews of your manuscript with your abstract. Make sure that you communicate to these first readers the relevance and value of your findings. Does your abstract clearly define the research question? Are the findings accurately reported? Is their relationship to prosthodontic practice clearly described? Don't let a hastily written abstract suggest flaws in the body of the report.

Selecting index words

In a sense, the index words constitute a very abbreviated abstract. As you prepare to list them, ask yourself: what are the major topics of this report? Are there lesser topics (e.g., a particular material, a unique measurement device) that should also be mentioned?

Although it may be helpful to consider what terms the Medline indexers will be likely to select for your report, it is not necessary to conform your list to the MeSH vocabulary.* In fact, when your published report is indexed at the National Library of Medicine, one of the approximately 90 indexers employed by the NLM will assign a longer list of index terms than will be included in the pages of the *JP*. These terms will be drawn from the controlled MeSH vocabulary and will include eight to ten subject heading terms plus appropriate "check tags" (e.g., human, animal, age). This level of detail is not required for the *JP*'s index terms.

It may be useful, however, to do a quick PubMed search of the Medline index (*www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez*) to see how a few of the most closely related published reports in your list of references have been indexed. As noted above, like the Medline indexers, you may wish to choose both major and minor index terms. For example, in the MeSH structure, *Dental Materials* is a general term. *Composite resins* is a subheading under Dental Materials and then, even more specific, *Compomers* is a subheading under Dental Materials. Other more general headings such as *Materials Testing* or *Comparative Study* will also convey useful information to the inquiring reader. Giving the reader both broad and narrow headings will help to convey the focus of your article.

Finally, however, and most important where terminology is concerned, while the Medline and the MeSH index can be useful for suggesting index heading ideas, any headings selected that are specific to the discipline of Prosthodontics should conform to the terminology found in the Glossary of Prosthodontic Terms (*J Prosthet Dent* 2005 Jul 94(1):10–92).

Preparing a research report is a demanding task, and when an author finally completes the Conclusion section, he or she may be tempted to quickly dash off an abstract and a somewhat arbitrary brief list of index words. Authors who remember that these are the first and sometimes the only sections of the paper that will be seen by many readers will take a little extra time for the preparation of these sections of the report.

*The MeSH vocabulary can be accessed online at *www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh* (June 1, 2006).