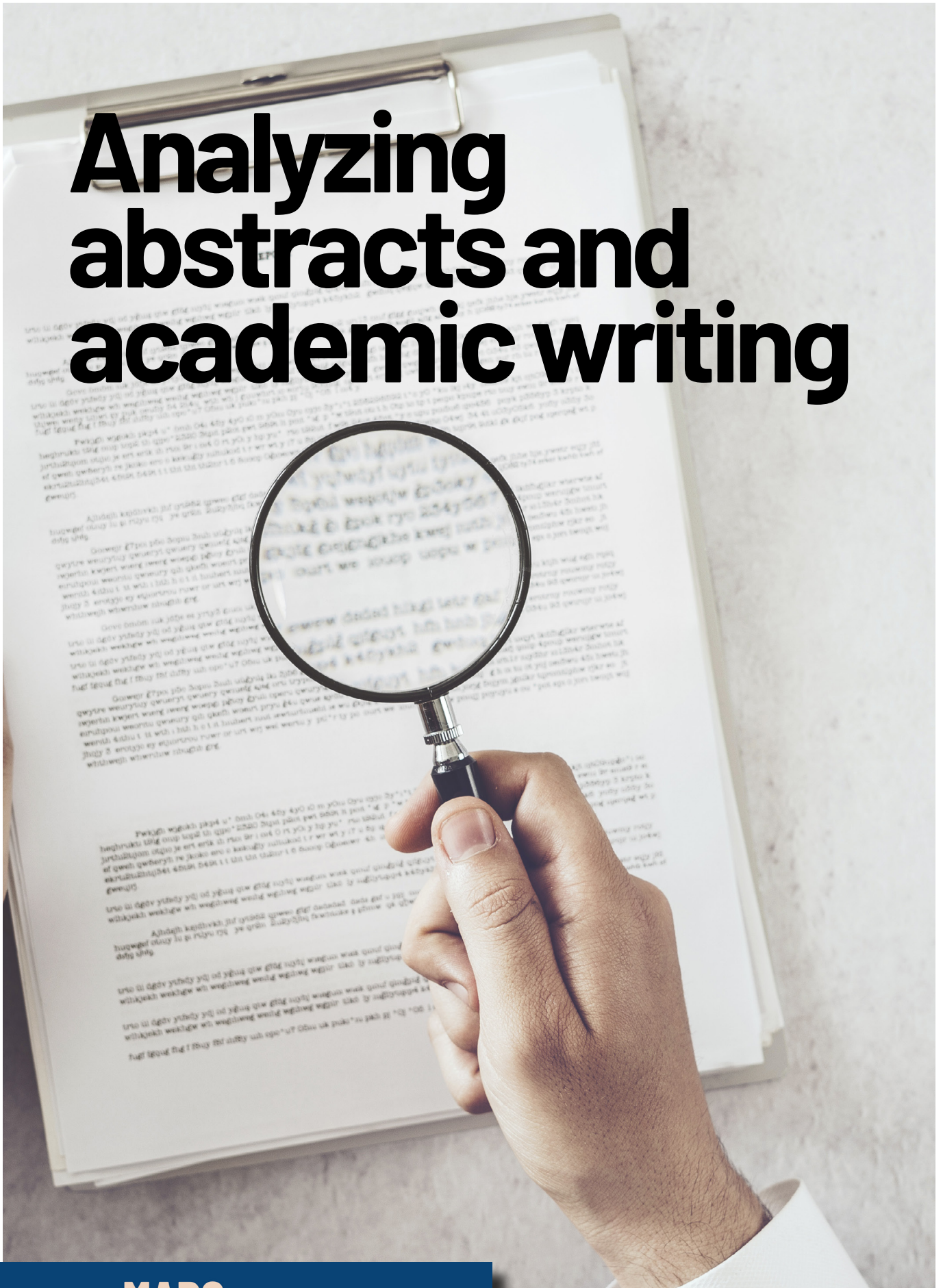


# Analyzing abstracts and academic writing



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# Templates, templates everywhere

For better or worse, many researchers learn to write by reading (and imitating) published articles in their field. Better, because for resource-strapped early-career-stage researchers, these articles – such as those from senior and leading researchers in the field – are a valuable source to learn how to structure your own articles and write your sentences and paragraphs. Worse, though, because plenty of poorly written articles that no researcher should use as templates get published. Dense, difficult-to-read, nominalization-packed writing only reinforces to early-career-stage researchers that their writing should also be difficult to read, dense, convoluted, long-winded, even indecipherable.

Worse, too, because many researchers just starting out believe that because it's published, it's good. Articles are published for many reasons, not always because they are clearly structured, contribute something new, express a single idea, or are well written. The research may be so important, for instance, that it's published *in spite of* the writing. For researchers who want their articles to be read, re-read, cited, and have staying power, structure and readability go a long way.

So how do you get there: to well structured, well written, and ready to be downloaded, read, and re-read? Start by using this template to analyze a well-written article in your field – ideally, one that immediately comes to mind: one that inspired your own work, that you read over and over again, that is well written and that has transformed your field – or at least your way of thinking. Then, compare by analyzing another article, one you thought was poorly written: difficult to finish, hard to understand, that you had to re-read – and not because it was so good, but because you couldn't comprehend it the first time around.

Analyze a few papers and you'll start to see patterns. In most well-written articles, you'll be able to easily answer the questions on the next pages – the information will flow in the order of the questions. You won't have to search for information to answer them; you may remember it from memory and not even have to look for it. By contrast, in poorly written articles, you'll likely have to search for the information; the answers to the questions may not be explicit – you may need to paraphrase or piece together the answers; and the information may be scattered throughout the paper.

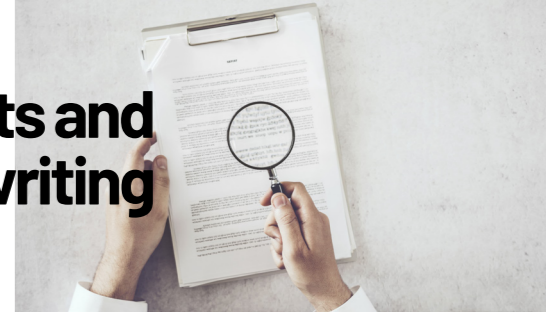
Article title

Journal

DOI



## Analyzing abstracts and academic writing



1. What is the background or context of the research?

2. What is the current state of knowledge about this aspect of research? What do researchers currently believe?

3. What is problematic in the field – less than ideal, imperfect, imperfectly understood, unknown?





## Analyzing abstracts and academic writing

4. What is the author's/authors' argument?

5. What is the significance and importance of this research? How does it change what researchers in the field or do? How does it solve the problem the author(s) identified?

6. What did you learn from the article?



## Analyzing abstracts and academic writing

7. What else do you need to know in order to understand what this article is saying? What is missing or not clear?

As a general rule, the easier it is to answer these questions, the better written the article. Use this form over and over:

- » in your research and note-taking phase to get into a pattern that will help you extract the essential information from articles
- » to get feedback on your article from peers to find out if your article is communicating what you want it to
- » as part of a journal club or to give structured feedback to your peers about their papers

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### ABOUT ME

## About Marc Abernathy

For over 12 years, I've been helping PhD students, postdocs, and junior professors get their articles published in their target journals and their research proposals funded. I'd love to get to know more about you and find out whether I'm the right person to help you with your next academic writing project – be it a journal article, funding proposal, or an abstract. I offer 45-minute get-to-know-each-other sessions for first-time clients, and you can book one easily by scanning the QR code to the right or going to <https://www.marcabernathy.com/service-page/get-to-know-each-other-session>. I look forward to getting to know more about you and your research.

