



## 5.8

## What abstract?

In this activity, students will learn how to write their own abstract. Abstracts are often seen as the most important part of a scientific paper - everything in a nutshell.

**Outcomes**

Students will be able to:

- describe the importance of abstracts
- summarise the main findings in papers
- describe the different styles of abstract.

**Time required**

Allow one hour.

**Outline of the activity**

Give each student one of the articles as provided, with the abstract removed.

Ask them as a class what the purpose of an abstract is, and then tell them to write an abstract based on the article they've just been given. Once they have done this, they should swap abstracts with the person next to them and find out if their abstract conveys the right message, that is the essence of the study. If not, why not?

Students could also be given the actual abstract to compare with their own.

**Tips and strategies**

Ideally, introduce students to plagiarism Activity 5.3 Copycat before running this activity. This activity may be slightly difficult for students who have never engaged with a scientific paper before, or seen an abstract. Give them a few examples to read through as a starter if this helps. The aim of this activity is to get students thinking about what messages to convey in an abstract, not to focus on the details of the paper itself.

Alternative challenges would be to:

- give the students just the title and results and ask them to come up with an abstract
- ask students to compare the differences between the abstract in a review and those of a scientific research paper
- give students a popular science article to summarise in 100 words.

Free articles are available from various journal publishers, such as Blackwell:

<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com>.