Write an abstract that grabs your reader’s attention

If you are writing an article for the peer-reviewed section of an RCNi journal, you’ll need an abstract – essentially a summary of your article. Writing for publication is all about the reader and, as an author, you want the reader to journey through your article from start to finish with as few obstacles, forks in the road and dead ends as possible. Think of the abstract as a guide to this journey.

**Highlight what’s important**
An abstract explains what lies ahead, it highlights important features or findings and it describes the end point.

A well written abstract can make the difference between readers reading your article and reflecting or acting on it, and their abandoning the journey before it has begun.

**Write the article before the abstract**
You cannot summarise what you have not yet written. Stick to the guidelines. Abstracts in RCNi journals have between 80 and 150 words. Anything longer is likely to be cut so make every word count.

Follow the same order of topics in the abstract as you do in the article. But write the abstract separately rather than cutting and pasting chunks of text from the article.

**Not too much detail**
Describe your article’s main arguments and findings broadly. The detail should be in the article itself.

All abstracts should be followed by a list of five or six keywords. These will help online searchers to find your article once it is published.

When choosing keywords, think about the article’s subject matter, the setting, the target group of patients or clients, the healthcare professionals involved, the techniques described and so on. For example, a typical set of keywords is: ‘depression’, ‘nursing homes’, ‘older people’, ‘community mental health nurses’, ‘cognitive behaviour therapy’.

**What matters?**
When writing the abstract, think about the article’s purpose. Be clear about the issue you are trying to address. What does it add to the sum of existing nursing knowledge? How is it likely to influence nursing practice?

The abstract should give readers a reason to read on. Avoid jargon and unexplained acronyms. This applies to the main text as well as the abstract, but the abstract should ‘sell’ the article to readers so it is important not to litter it with words and phrases that confuse and discourage.

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