

The “Abstract” / “Executive Summary” – Exercise 1

Few things are as important to professional writing, grant writing, or writing for social change as a great “Abstract” or “Executive Summary.” These begin with problem definition (preferably two sentences), then an outline of a solution (another two sentences), and end with a concluding sentence intended to inspire and give confidence. The second sentence of the problem definition should directly say *or strongly imply* that “as a consequence” of the problem stated, this more specific problem exists. The abstract/executive summary leaves out details, but sets a framework within which details and plans can be clearly understood.

Read about the abstract or executive summary in more detail in Richard Guzman’s [Writing Well Wherever You Work](#) (particularly chapter 3), and do the following exercises.

1. Read the following, then construct a clear, compact, five-sentence abstract from it.

The internal environment of a modern building can be a comfortable one no matter how uncomfortable the external environment. In general the reason is that energy is freely spent to heat or cool the building. In earlier times, however, when energy was not so readily available and machines such as air conditioners did not exist, the designers of buildings had to rely on other strategies to maximize the comfort of the internal environment. For example, the traditional architecture of many cultures in climates where the temperatures are uncomfortably hot during the day and uncomfortably cool at night features buildings with thick walls of brick or stone. Such walls are both insulators and reservoirs of heat, so that during the hotter hours of the day the flow of heat from the external environment to the internal one is retarded, and during the cooler hours part of the heat stored in the walls warms the internal environment and the rest is lost to the external one. The net result is a flattening of the temperature-variation curve inside the building. In a period when the energy costs of buildings are being intensively reevaluated, such strategies clearly merit close consideration. In Iran certain traditional designs achieve more than a flattening of the temperature curve; they circulate cool air through the building and can even keep water cold and ice frozen from the winter until the height of the long, hot summer of the country’s arid central and eastern plains. They do so without any input of energy other than that of the natural environment; hence they can be characterized as passive cooling systems.

2. The following is an early draft of an abstract for a proposed class project. Write a *brief* analysis of its effectiveness—noting, for example, if the problem is well-defined and the solutions seem to fit the problem—then rewrite it to better follow the Problem-Solution-Conclusion format. You may have to “make up” or insert what you believe are pertinent facts or concepts to create a better P-S-C statement.

Learning is a cognitive function comprised of interdependent skill sets. By training the brain, the effectiveness, automaticity, and efficiency of these skills increase, which in turn increases the individual’s ability to learn and think. Most struggling or at-risk students find learning difficult due to underdeveloped cognitive skills. Unable to keep up with academic expectations, many are forced to withdraw from college, plummeting into debt and severely

hindering opportunities in life. By utilizing available cognitive skills training programs, colleges and universities can address the student's cognitive deficiencies. Strengthening these weak skills, in turn, increases the student's confidence, and student success in life.

3. The following is another early draft of an abstract for a proposed class project. Again, write a *brief* analysis of its effectiveness (as suggested in 2 above), then rewrite it to better follow the Problem-Solution-Conclusion format.

Growing up in Chicago, I noticed that a lot of my friends and family had wonderful talents but no opportunity to express themselves. Many of these friends and family members chose to head in a negative direction because they had nowhere else to turn. That is when I vowed to create a positive environment for people with similar creative ability to express themselves. Teenagers commonly feel that they are not heard. I want to be the person who helps them express themselves without acting out. The Creativity Development Academy (CDA) will be a place to entertain their creative expressions that usually labels them as a stereotypical outcast because their interests are different from those of their peers. The CDA will have programs to help students enhance their written, verbal and artistic skills through a number of workshops. The purpose of this academy is to show the students that there is nothing wrong with being different. We want to embrace the differences and show them how to help others do the same. The CDA will host 2-3 nights where the students from the academy can demonstrate their skills to the community. This will give them a positive setting to showcase what they are learning in the academy. The CDA will be a place for the students to help develop their creative thinking and speaking skills. Students will have a fun and exciting way to learn tools such as drama and public speaking that will assist in increasing their confidence levels at an early stage of their lives. These young adults will also develop their social skills that will decrease their shyness. By the end of the program, students will be able to speak at graduation ceremonies with little or no concern.

4. The following is yet another early draft of an abstract for a proposed class project. Again, write a *brief* analysis of its effectiveness (as suggested in 2 above), then rewrite it to better follow the Problem-Solution-Conclusion format.

Recent studies examine the impact of a veteran's post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and the effects it has on their children. Veterans with PTSD experience symptoms that affect their relationships with family, friends and especially their children. The impact that a parent's PTSD has on a child is often called secondary traumatization. Children of veterans suffering from PTSD are at risk for social, behavioral, academic and emotional problems. The Zion Project can serve as a practical resource for these children to understand and eventually feel at ease about their parent's PTSD.