ABSTRACT WRITING

A well-written abstract should summarize five essential things to help the reader know what the study is about:

(a) purpose of the study,

(b) source(s) from where the data are drawn (usually referred to as participants),

(c) the method(s) used for collecting data,

(d) the general results, and (e) general interpretation of the results. Some abstracts may contain more than these things, but unfortunately some abstracts do not contain some (if not all) of these essential elements.

With this information, the consumer will know from the abstract whether the article is of interest. To illustrate, I extracted the prior five pieces of information from the abstract of a study by Treiman, Kessler, and Bourassa(2001), which looked at whether a child’s spelling ability is affected by knowledge of his or her own name.

**Using tenses in scientific writing**

Tense considerations **;or** science writing

When **you write** an **experimental report, or** draft a **thesis chapter, you need to choose** which tense, **or tenses,** to

use.

This flyer provides advice intended to help you become more conscious of **what** the choice of verb tense involves, and to become better able to notice the tense choices that writers *m* your particular field have **made.**

From your **chosen** tense, **your** reader **receives** two kinds **of** information. One concerns **time:** it is about 'when' (past, present or future). The other relates to whether an event **or** process is **open** or **closed.**

The examples below illustrate the distinction between open' and 'closed' events:

*How long* ***were*** *you at Melbourne Unl?*

**Simple past / closed event:** the other person has already graduated.

*How long have you been at Melbourne Urn?*

**Present perfect / open event:** the other person is still engaged on his / her course.

**What do tenses do?**

Verb tenses present a **relationship** between

» the present moment (now), and,

• another moment or period in time (which may be long or short).

These moments or periods may be in the past, present **or** future.

*Tenses* ***manage time by placing them***

*within particular relationships* ***or*** *'time* ***frameworks'.***

As a generalization: in various types of scientific writing,

some time frameworks are more commonly used than others. Their frequency vanes from one section of a paper or report to another, and they can also vary between one scientific discipline and another.

The next section gives some advice about the various tenses.

**Abstract**

This usually refers to your unpublished results and uses the **past tense.**

**Introduction**

Your introduction needs to include background information which is generally accepted as fact in a discipline. You also need to explain why the research you are reporting is important. It is usually presented in the **present tense.** Example:

*Genomics provides crucial information for rational drug design.*

You will need to refer to existing research relevant to your work, and you can indicate your opinion of the research you are writing about by careful tense selection.

For example, when you use the **present tense** you are indicating to the reader that you believe that the research findings are still true and relevant, even though the original research may have been conducted some time ago. Example:

*Many of the lakes and wetlands In the region are located in craters or valleys blocked by early Pliocene lava flows (Oilier & Joyce, 1964).*

**Present perfect tense to report research**

If you use **present perfect tense** in your introduction when you refer to previous research, you communicate 'recency' or 'currency'. Currency may be **positive**

(asserting that previous studies have established a firm research foundation) or **negative** (asserting that not enough relevant or valid work has yet been done).

Positive and negative currency can even be asserted in the same sentence, as in the example below (which uses the **passive voice):** Example:

*A great deal of research has been conducted on the*

*basic techniques of nuclear transfer, but few experiments have been carried out to discover the most appropriate age of the cytoplasm to support nuclear transfer most effectively.*