Abstract Worksheet

Answer the following questions in 1 or 2 sentences, avoiding "I," "we," or "you":

1. What question did you study? _____
   _____
   _____
2. What is the significant background or context? Why is the question important?
   _____
   _____
   _____
3. What overall approach was used to study the question? _____
   _____
   _____
4. What were the significant results? _____
   _____
   _____
5. What do these results mean? What major conclusions follow from them? Why are they important?_____
   _____
   _____
   _____

These five questions form the essential elements of an abstract: a brief, complete summary of your paper.

Using these sentences, write a coherent paragraph of no more than 150 words.

*Adapted from Leslie C. Perelman, B.J. Hughey, and I.W. Hunter, 2/28/2006.

Abstract Guidelines

Your thesis needs a kind of abstract known as an "informative abstract," the intention of which is to let a reader know whether or not to delve into your entire thesis in all its detail. (The other kind of abstract is the "descriptive abstract," which is commonly used for work in process, in proposals, for example, where the results and analysis are not yet known and can only be guessed at or hypothesized about.)

An informative abstract summarizes the contents of the paper, including results and conclusions. It is a sort of "micro" paper, comprised of a sentence or two from each section of the paper. This means, typically, a sentence or two from the introduction, methods, results, and each discussion / analysis / conclusion section.

It is generally:

- written in past tense;
- written in passive voice;
- lacking in background (such as that contained in the literature review);
- about 150 words (very concise);
- useful in helping a reader decide whether to read more of the work;

Here is an example of an informative abstract (courtesy M Zoll, Writing Across the Curriculum):

Problem statement:

> The mood-stabilizing effects of omega 3 fatty acids in patients with bipolar disorder were studied.

Method:

> A 4-month, double-blind, placebo-controlled study compared omega3 fatty acids (9.6 g/day) versus placebo (olive oil), in 30 patients with bipolar disorder who continued on their usual treatment.

Results:

> A Kaplan-Meier survival analysis showed that the omega 3 fatty acid group had a significantly longer period of remission than the placebo group ($P = .002$). In addition, for nearly every other outcome measure, the omega 3 fatty acid group performed better than the placebo group.

Discussion, conclusion:

> Omega 3 fatty acids were well tolerated and improved the short-term course of illness in this preliminary study of patients with bipolar disorder.