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**Making Sense of Scholarly Journal Abstracts**

***What are abstracts? Simply put, they are summaries of the articles retrieved during a search of a database. For example, below is a journal article citation and the abstract or summary*:**

**Do They Buy for their Dogs the Way they Buy for Themselves?**

By: [Tesfom, Goitom](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/abicomplete/indexinglinkhandler/sng/au/Tesfom%2C%2BGoitom/%24N?accountid=4485); [Birch, Nancy](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/abicomplete/indexinglinkhandler/sng/au/Birch%2C%2BNancy/%24N?accountid=4485). [***Psychology & Marketing***](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/abicomplete/pubidlinkhandler/sng/pubtitle/Psychology%2B%2426%2BMarketing/%24N/37550/DocView/745957780/abstract/B30590AF3D1F4805PQ/1?accountid=4485)[27.9](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/abicomplete/indexingvolumeissuelinkhandler/37550/Psychology%2B%2426%2BMarketing/02010Y09Y01%2423Sep%2B2010%243b%2B%2BVol.%2B27%2B%24289%2429/27/9?accountid=4485) (Sep 2010): 898 Abstract: Motivated by the fact that pet food and pet care is a big business and pet owners in the United States spend more on their pets each year, the objective of this research is to determine whether dog owners buy for their dogs the way they buy for themselves. The data show that dog owners are more loyal to dog food brands than human food brands. Dog owners are also found to be more sensitive to human food price than dog food price. The survey results also show that dog owners are more serious about buying healthy dog food than buying healthy human food. The findings are significant because they suggest that manufacturers and marketers of dog food and vet care service providers can gain some insight about the type of food and medical services dog owners might buy for their dogs by studying dog owners' food and medical service consumption decision patterns. [PUBLICATION ABSTRACT]

**Almost all journal articles have a similar structure that we can see in the example above. Look for:**

* **RESEARCH QUESTION: The “objective of this research” tells you what the authors’ research question is, what they want to examine or prove;**
* **METHODOLOGY: In this example, the Methodology is indicated by “the survey results also show.” The authors conducted a survey of dog owners to gather their data. In this sample the Methodology is not clearly stated so you have to be alert to the clues.**
* **RESULTS: “the data show” and “the survey results show” are both presenting summaries of the Results of the authors’ study.**
* **{Note: often scholarly articles will also have a “Discussion” section before the Conclusion. The Discussion usually is an interpretation and, yes, a discussion of the results. This example does not have one.}**
* **CONCLUSION: “The findings are significant because” presents the conclusion; the authors are telling you what they and we can learn from their research and often suggestions for further research.**

**REMEMBER: *Scholarly Journals present original research or analysis! This is an essential characteristic of scholarly articles.***

***THIS IS HOW MOST SCHOLARLY ARTICLES IN THE SCIENCES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES ARE CONSTRUCTED!* Once you know this then understanding the articles is easier. You will learn that the most important “evidence” for your research comes from the Conclusion.**

**But what about the Humanities?**

**Fields such as Literature, Philosophy, Religion, History and Arts often conduct research very differently from the Social Sciences and Sciences. Humanities research frequently centers on ANALYSIS, such as an analysis of an author’s work. BUT they still use the same basic components, just in different form.**

**Here is an example from Philosophy:**

**Dogs and Concepts**

By: Crary, Alice. Philosophy, Apr2012, Vol. 87 Issue 2, p215-237, 23p **Abstract**: This article is a contribution to discussions about the prospects for a viable conceptualism, i.e., a viable view that represents our modes of awareness as conceptual all the way down. The article challenges the assumption, made by friends as well as foes of conceptualism, that a conceptualist stance necessarily commits us to denying animals minds. Its main argument starts from the conceptualist doctrine defended in the writings of John McDowell. Although critics are wrong to represent McDowell as implying that animals are mindless brutes, it is difficult to see what is wrong with this critical unless we depart from McDowell's technical terminology and introduce a notion of a concept flexible enough to apply to the lives of some non-rational animals. The article closes with a discussion of observations that speak for attributing concepts, flexibly understood, to dogs. [ABSTRACT FROM AUTHOR]

**What are the key word and phrase clues that tell us this is RESEARCH BASED?**

* **“This article is a contribution”**
* **“The article challenges the assumption”**
* **“Its main argument starts”**
* **“The article closes with a discussion”**

**How do these compare to the sections of a research article in the first example from the Social Sciences?**

* **RESEARCH QUESTION: “The article challenges the assumption…that a conceptualist stance necessarily commits us…” Note that this abstract is grounded in Philosophical theory, which by itself is a clue it is probably scholarly;**
* **METHODOLOGY: “Its main argument starts from the conceptualist doctrine defended in the writings of John McDowell.” The author is analyzing McDowell’s work and that of his critics;**
* **RESULTS: “Although critics are wrong to represent McDowell…” The author’s results in this example are hard to spot if you are new to Humanities research. Look closely;**
* **CONCLUSION: “The article closes with a discussion of observations…” You will have to read the article to get the full Conclusion, but it is there.**

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