

Focusing on your Central Message

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This is one of the most important parts of writing your paper, and one that is often overlooked. Think carefully about what it is that you want your readers to understand about your work. Remember, we are all busy and we need to absorb your message quickly and clearly. Try these exercises:

1. Write down the three central points of your paper.
2. Summarize your paper in one sentence.
3. Describe your work to a colleague in one minute.

These might sound easy but try them and you'll find out they aren't!

Don't rush this part of your planning. It is worth spending time getting it right. Once you have mastered these exercises you will feel more confident about the whole writing process that follows.

A common problem with summarizing your work is that there are usually several major findings. This exercise is meant to focus your thinking on the central issues. It is not going to form the published abstract. So, if you really can't squeeze your key message into one sentence don't worry. Try to do it in two. If you can't do that then you need to take a careful look at the reasons. Remember, this is a very important part of the process for writing papers so work at it. Talk to your colleagues and see if between you it is possible to highlight the central message of your work.

A number of studies have indicated that a badly written manuscript with poor use of English, even with good science, has less chance of being accepted and published.