Why do I struggle while writing an abstract?

Lack of confidence

Do you spend a lot of time thinking and worrying about about other people writing their abstract or reading your abstracts?

Look at examples but beware as not all abstracts written by other people will be good.

Doubt your writing skills

You think our abstract is bad, it will be rejected, the grammar and sentence structure are wrong.

"When you doubt your power, you give power to your doubt." (Honore de Balzac)

Your story deserves to be told. Write to a broad audience – peoples of various backgrounds – as your abstract will be read by everyone. Use simple sentences and plain language.

Where to start

Do you delay the start of the abstract writing because you have not thought the WHOLE abstract at once?

You only need to know the first step to start.

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Writing an abstract is a fundamental skill. We need it for conferences, papers, dissertations etc. However many struggle with this task. Here is some advice for you.

SPIE. STUDENT CHAPTER
UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA

How to write a successful abstract

An abstract is a summary of your work usually no more than 200 – 500 words long. The function of the abstract is to convince the reader is worth to make an effort to find out more about your work.

Structure of the abstract

The abstract can be grouped in two parts:

Motivation of your work.
Outcome of your work.

The abstract should answer fundamental questions about your work:

Why you did it?
What you did ?
    How you did it?
    What you found?
    So what does it mean?

For each question try to think of 3-5 sub-questions. For each sub-question write 1-2 sentences.

Go ahead and practice writing your abstract. After all, practice makes perfect!

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Part 1 **Motivation**	Part 2 **Outcome**

Why?
Why do something?
Why is the problem interesting?
How important is the work?
Where is the difficulty area?
What will be the impact if successful?

What?
What to do?
What problems are *you* trying to solve?
How large is the scope of *your* work?
How to go about the solution?

How?
What does your research do?
What is the extent of your work?
What are the important variables controlled, ignored and measured?

What?
What you found?
What were the answers?

So what?
What you concluded?
What are the implications?
Are the results general or specific?
What additional research is needed?

Example of an abstract limited to 250 words.
Why?
In normal concentrations benzene in air isn't harmful to animals or plants. Nevertheless, it has been proven to be carcinogen. For places people work for hours with fuel, glue, paint, detergents etc. the monitoring of benzene levels in the air and the breath of employees after work might be crucial.
What?
Cavity Ring-Down Spectroscopy (CRDS) is a method that avoids typical sensitivity limitations to detect gas phase molecules in air. Using CRDS real-time speed, high precision and sensitivity measurements of environmental and emission monitoring are possible.
How?
We have constructed a CRDS set-up to measure the concentration of benzene in the air using a 266 nm pulse laser. We tried to determine the degree of sensitivity for the set-up. To measure the sensitivity both pre-made bags with known concentration from 1ppm of to 950 ppm benzene were used.
What?
The results show that it is possible to detect the concentration of benzene using the CRDS set-up, however, it was noted that for larger concentrations the measurements have to be longer to achieve stability of time constant. Also the system was sensitive to all molecules which absorbed laser light. At the same time it was noted that the set-up has some long term stability issues with both the laser and the vacuum pump.
So what?
In conclusion, the CRDS set-up is sensitive to benzene of up to 1ppm concentration, although some problems with long term stabilities are observed. A tunable laser is required to achieve detection selectivity.