

EDITORIALS



Restructured abstracts for research in *The BMJ*

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This issue marks a shift in the way research articles will be presented in the print edition of *The BMJ*. We will continue to publish the definitive, unabridged version of accepted research papers online, with open access and no word limits. These articles will then be summarised for print in a newly designed, streamlined abstract format.

It has been 17 years since we first abridged research papers for the print version of *The BMJ*. There is no definite agreed format for structured abstracts, although there is consensus about the key pieces of information that such abstracts should contain. Our first attempts to produce shortened print versions of online research papers were known as “ELPS” (electronic long, print short). Because ELPS versions were sometimes confused with the full paper online, we developed a shorter, one page summary for print known as the “Pico” (meaning “short”).^{1,2} In the seven years since the Pico was introduced, there have been more changes in how our readers encounter and use the research we publish. Our readers have been clear that they want research in the print journal but not as presented in the Pico’s full page summary.

Many readers still rely on the print edition to alert them to important news and progress in research, but the definitive version of research papers appears online along with blogs, podcasts, and much additional journal content. Our goal for *The BMJ*’s print version is to provide readers with accurate, engaging summaries of research. Ideally, these summaries will quickly acquaint readers with the important aspects of a study. They can then decide whether they would like to read the full paper on thebmj.com.

Our new restructured abstracts combine the best features of traditional scientific abstracts with those of the Pico—while

keeping to a 400 word count. The result is a shorter, more readable abstract that efficiently presents the main evidence from a study. We have retained features of the Pico that readers especially liked, such as the clear articulation of the principal question that the study aims to answer in the first of the new abstract’s five sections. Other sections will summarise the study methods, the study answer and limitations, and what the study adds as well as include a statement of funding, competing interests, and data sharing. In line with ICMJE recommendations, information about trial registration will also appear, where applicable. The new abstracts will be published online as the abstract for the paper and on PubMed, as well as in print.

We hope that our restructured abstracts will make it easy for readers to recognise and navigate the research content of the journal, while providing the best possible brief summary of each research paper. In the print version, many abstracts will include a table or figure that summarises key numerical findings, or will be presented alongside abridged versions of linked commentaries to help readers put particular research papers into context. Additional print features will include highlights from our articles on research methods and reporting, plus Richard Lehman’s online blog about noteworthy research papers of the week.

We welcome your comments and thoughts as we implement our plans to improve the way we present research findings to our readers.

- 1 Tonks A. New format for *BMJ* research articles in print. *BMJ* 2008;337:a2946.
- 2 Groves T. Innovations in publishing *BMJ* research. *BMJ* 2008;337:a3123.

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