What is an abstract?

An abstract is a brief summary of a piece of work and should tell the reader what the main point of the work is. The abstract usually comes after the title (but before the main body of text) and will signpost the main aim(s), how the work was carried out, what the main findings are (including any statistical results) and the main conclusion(s). For some disciplines (e.g. business, engineering) the abstract might be called an executive summary. It is short, usually under 200 words but should have enough information for the reader to decide whether reading the whole thing will be useful or not.

Why produce an abstract for your work?

A good abstract is actually quite difficult to write as it needs to be concise and precise. And you can't really write it until the piece is almost finished as it should be an accurate summary of what will be presented to the reader. However, it is a really useful way of checking whether you've answered the question and presented a logical argument – if you read the title, the abstract should give a sensible answer.

How to write an abstract for the Academic Skills IWA Report

For the report, we want you to produce a short abstract (around 100 words), using the following criteria, to tell the reader:

1. What the report is investigating
2. How it was done
3. What was found
4. What the main conclusion is.

The abstract is not included in your word count, and will be marked as part of your introduction. As an example, have a look at the abstract from the exemplar report and how it links to the four criteria:

[1] This report looks at the reasons behind first year dropout from Higher Education. **[2] A survey of the literature** identified [3] four key factors that contribute to first year dropout: academic issues; social issues; academic realism and finance and homesickness. **[4] The report identifies pre-university academic skills provision as effective at preventing first year drop-out.**

(and the text version should you want to play around with the formatting)

[1] This report looks at the reasons behind first year dropout from Higher Education. [2] **A survey of the literature** identified [3] four key factors that contribute to first year dropout: academic issues; social issues; academic realism and finance and homesickness. [4] **The report identifies pre-university academic skills provision as effective at preventing first year drop-out.**