

HOW TO WRITE AN ABSTRACT

An abstract is an outline, summary, or synopsis of the main points. It is the original pared down to its essential elements. It is the article or chapter in microcosm.

- ! Because you are not the author of the article or chapter abstracted, it follows that the abstract or synopsis has nothing to do with you. A synopsis of the article or chapter would not include the fact that you read it or any information about how you responded to it. In short, your job is to summarize the article itself, not your thoughts or feelings about it.
- ! Because the author and title of the abstracted work already appear in the bibliographical entry which precedes the abstract, mention of the author – especially in extended phrases like, “Peterson and Gross reach the conclusion that,” or “O’Reilly stated,” or “in the opinion of Rand and McNally” – is generally a waste of words.
- ! Because we already know who the author is and because you want to be economical with words, an abstract is one of those places where the passive voice can be quite useful. E.g., “Each of 126 welfare recipients were interviewed before and after meeting with their caseworkers.” Rather than “Michael Turgison and Emily Lau interviewed each of 126 welfare recipients before and after each had met with her caseworker.”
- ! Because the abstract is the original work in microcosm, it follows that the structure of the abstract ought to parallel the structure of the original article or chapter. In serious scholarly work that structure will often be in the form of
 - " hypothesis
 - " methods employed to test the hypothesis
 - " conclusion.
- ! In the case of your assignment for this class, the abstract is to be preceded by a complete bibliographical citation in one of the four formats approved for the course.
- ! In the case of your assignment for this class, your oral report obligations are
 - " to report what you read and to summarize its major points,
 - " to relate your selection to the assigned readings we have all done,
 - " to share the lessons you learned from the selection, and
 - " to answer questions from the other participants in the seminar.
- ! Note that the written submission is completely described in the first of the four oral report obligations: to report **what you read** and to **summarize its major points**.
 - " **“what you read”** covers the complete biographical citation discussed above
 - " **“summarize its major points”** covers the abstract

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Pomper, Gerald M. "Parliamentary Government in the United States?" *Political Parties, Campaigns, and Elections*. Ed. Robert E. DiClerico. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000. Pp. 269-285.

Excluding its separation of legislature and executive, the United States government highly resembles a parliamentary system in which "elections are contests between competitive parties presenting alternative programs, under leaders chosen from and by the parties' legislators or activists" (269). This transformation in governing styles is evident in six characteristics of the modern political parties:

- The parties present meaningful programs;
- They bridge the institutional separations of national government;
- They reasonably fulfill their promises;
- They act cohesively under strong legislative leadership;
- They have assumed a major role in campaigning; and
- They provide the recruitment base for presidential candidates (270).

In parliamentary systems voters elect parties with specific policy goals and agendas to power. Although American elections are viewed as being primarily candidate-centered, candidates run under party headings, and parties are associated with different priorities and programs. These party programs often form the bases for candidates' campaigns, such as the Republicans' 1994 Contract With America and the Democrats' 1996 Families First Agenda. These party programs, which consist mostly of future promises rather than rhetoric, influence Congressional members and the executive. For example, three-fourths of the Democratic Families First Agenda was included in President Clinton's program (273).

Besides developing party agendas, the political parties also are successful at adhering to and achieving their policy objectives. In 1992, Democrats in Congress fulfilled 70% of their promises, and President Clinton achieved 69% of his campaign promises (274). Republicans achieved similar success (69%) when implementing their 1994 Contract With America (275). The Republicans' 1994 success exemplifies parliamentary initiative. Republicans were in power, and President Clinton eventually buckled to their agenda.

Strong party cohesion, typical of parliamentary parties, is becoming increasingly evident in the United States government. Approximately 75% of all House votes are party unity votes. The average legislator's party unity score is 80% for Democrats and 87% for Republicans (280). Party organizations strengthen themselves (especially their platforms) by recruiting and largely funding loyal candidates. Contrary to popular belief, political parties provide candidates with more funding than PACs (279). Viable presidential candidates always come from high in the ranks of the two major political parties. Third party candidates are not key players in the elections.

The separation of power between the legislature and executive will always prevent the United States from becoming a true parliamentary system. However, presidencies that lack policy initiative (including the Clinton administration) invite parliamentary patterns of government to emerge from the political parties.