

Learning Lab: How to write an effective abstract

Thursday 23 June, 13:00 - 15:00 BST

Open to all to attend

- Amos Laar, University of Ghana and African Nutrition Society
- Linley Chiwona Karlton, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
- Bhavani Shankar, IMMANA, Institute for Sustainable Food, University of Sheffield
- Joe Yates, ANH Academy, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine



ANH2022

Agriculture, Nutrition and Health Academy Week

LEARNING LABS



#ANH2022



ANH-Academy.org/ANH2022

Learning objectives/outcomes:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the different kinds of abstracts that can be written of research findings
2. Have an improved idea of what editors and scientific committees look for when reviewing abstracts
3. Recognise key elements to include when composing a short summary of research
4. Be able to select and refine language to make an abstract clear, concise and compelling.
5. Be equipped to ensure that an abstract meets the criteria of different events or platforms

Rationale for this learning lab

Reflections on:

- ANH Academy Weeks since 2016
- African Nutrition Society conferences
- Journal editing experiences
- Personal experiences with failure

Motivated by:

- Addressing inequities and representation in science
- Ensuring that good research is not let down by small but significant problems



Overview

What are abstracts and why are they so important?

What is an abstract?

Cambridge Dictionary definition:

“a short form of a speech, article, book, etc., giving only the most important facts or ideas: summary of the contents of a book, article, or speech.”

Why is summarising research so important?

- People are reading as much (or maybe more) than ever due to technology
- But...tech is also distracting. Maybe be diminishing our stamina/motivation to read long form texts.
- Are we just skimming?
- And maybe our attention spans are changing too? (much debated!)

Question for audience

When was the last time you read a whole paper, cover to cover? Be honest!

AnswerGarden -- <https://answergarden.ch/2504357>

- Your abstract (or even, title) might be the only thing that is read by researchers, media, practitioners
- An average reader will read 130 words per minute. So 200 words = 1.5 minutes
- Without careful communication, important science can 'gather dust on shelves'
- 21st Century: Noise noise noise online! How to cut through it?
- Conference committees and journal editors see hundreds, sometimes thousands of submissions. Initial screening may be brief.
- Same for inclusion in reviews. Your study maybe be included/excluded on the strength of your title and abstract only



Different types of abstract

And picking the right home for your work

Two major types of written abstracts

Structured

(often more common for conferences)

Example

ANH Academy Week

- Abstract title (100 words)
- Introduction (200 words)
- Methods or approach (200 words)
- Findings and interpretations (200 words)
- Conclusions (100 words)

Pros: Forces one to follow a logical sequence of describing research

Cons: Not flexible

Unstructured

(often more common in journals)

Example

Food Policy journal

“A concise and factual abstract of **100-250 words** is required. The abstract should state briefly the purpose of the research, the principal results and major conclusions. **An abstract is often presented separately from the article, so it must be able to stand alone.** For this reason, references should be avoided, but if essential, then cite just the author(s) and year(s). Also, non-standard or uncommon abbreviations should be avoided, but if essential they must be defined at their first mention in the abstract itself.”

Pros: Freedom to describe research in any way

Cons: Illusion of flexibility, easy to omit important content

A quick word on other abstract types

- Graphical abstracts
- Extended abstracts
- Audio summary
- Short animation

Informative, indicative, descriptive abstracts

- An ***informative abstract*** extracts everything relevant from the paper, such as research objectives, methods employed, results obtained and conclusions drawn. Such abstracts may serve as a highly aggregated substitute for the full paper.

- An ***indicative or descriptive*** abstract rather describes the content of the paper and may thus serve as an outline of what is presented in the paper. This kind of abstract cannot serve as a substitute for the full text.

Key steps in preparing your abstract

How to approach the process

Start with the guidance!

- Is the abstract structured or unstructured?
- What length?
- How will it be evaluated? Specific criteria to meet?
- Any specific content that must / must not be included? i.e. references

A surprising number of abstracts fall down on this basic step!



State your problem. If readers don't grasp the problem, they're not going to care about the solution (i.e., your research) or get the significance of what you've found.



Have a main point. An abstract is like a brief news item on your research. Rather than squeezing in as many findings as possible, write a few bullet points or "sound bites" about your most important data and then shape the abstract around them.



Target a broad audience. The abstract should be aimed at a wider audience than the paper itself, because you never know who will come across it online and in database searches. Thus, it should contain few, if any, jargon terms or acronyms.



Say what you found, not what you did. Statements about methods (we did this) can almost always be rephrased as statements about findings (we found this). It's always more interesting to hear about results than methods, plus you'll save on words.



Be explicit about the significance of the research. If you want to compel people to read your paper, don't make them guess what you think the data mean. A good abstract includes a statement at the end about the significance of the work, the more specific the better.



Eliminate writing errors. When people are skimming text very quickly they are less patient with writing errors and hard-to-read prose.



Choose keywords carefully. This will increase your paper's chance of being found in searches.

A magnifying glass with a black handle and a silver frame is positioned over a background of horizontal stripes in various colors including red, yellow, green, and blue. The magnifying glass is focused on the center of the image, where a dark blue semi-transparent box contains white text.

What are reviewers looking for?

Things to do, things to avoid

Common problems to avoid:

The abstract provides a statement of what the paper will ask or explore rather than what it found:

X This report examines the causes of oversleeping. (What did it find out about these causes?)

✓ Individuals oversleep because they go to bed too late, forget to set their alarms, and keep their rooms dark.

The abstract provides general categories rather than specific details in the findings:

X The study draws conclusions about which variables are most important in choosing a movie theater. (What, specifically, are these variables?)

✓ The study concludes that the most important variables in choosing a movie theater are comfortable seats and high-quality popcorn.

Example of reviewer criteria

- Relevance
- Scientific rigour
- Abstract quality
- Originality
- Poster or oral presentation recommendation: (Oral/ Poster/Both)
- Flag for special attention?

Check the guidance!

Example of an abstract incrementally improving with feedback 1/3.

RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE CONTEXT: NAVIGATING CONTEXTUAL BARRIERS THROUGH WOMEN'S GROUPS

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[International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship Volume 14 Issue 2](#)

Abstract

This study examined how rural women navigate context-related barriers to participate in rural entrepreneurship in low-income countries. It is based on a qualitative research that involved interviews and focus group discussions with 56 women from twelve women's groups engaged in agribusiness in rural Tanzania. The data were analysed thematically supported by verbatim extracts from the interviews. The findings indicate that rural women face unique challenges that hinder them from effectively participating in rural entrepreneurship. Limited access to farming land and profitable markets, lack of business networks, time poverty and the dearth of financial resources constrain women's entrepreneurial activities. These challenges arise from the rural context where the social, institutional, business and spatial dimensions affect women more prominently. To overcome the contextual barriers, some rural women organize into groups, enabling them to access business services, training to improve their skills, grants and business networks. Based on the results, it is concluded that collective efforts through women's groups have contributed to rural entrepreneurship endeavours among rural women.

Key words: *Context, Rural Entrepreneurship, Kahama rural, Shinyanga rural, Women's Groups*

Topic Choice

<https://journals.aom.org/doi/10.5465/amj.2011.61965960>

Setting the Hook – suggested by editor

<https://journals.aom.org/doi/10.5465/amj.2011.4000>

Example of an abstract incrementally improving with feedback Cont 2/3.

Abstract with Journal Identified 2021-01-21

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper ~~is was~~ to examine how rural women navigate context-related barriers ~~and how they to participate engage~~ in rural entrepreneurship ~~in low-income countries~~. ~~It~~ ~~The paper~~ combines contextualising entrepreneurship framework and feminist separatist theory to ~~explore describe~~ how women's groups enable women to circumvent context related barriers and ~~participate to actively engage~~ in rural entrepreneurship.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper builds on case studies of twelve women's groups engaged in paddy rice farming, processing and marketing in rural Tanzania. It draws on in-depth interviews with forty-eight women, four focus group discussions and four key informants.

Findings – The ~~paper results unveil reveal~~ that rural women face unique context related challenges that hinder them from effectively participating in rural entrepreneurship. ~~Specific~~ Linley Chiwona Karitun, 1/21/2021
6:09:00 PM inserted:
engagement in entrepreneurship access to farming land and profitable markets, lack of business networks, time dearth of financial resources constrain women's ~~entrepreneurial activities engagement in entrepreneurship~~. To overcome the contextual barriers, ~~some~~ rural women ~~have~~ organized into groups. ~~By coming together in groups, this,~~ ~~enabling~~ them to access business services, training to improve their skills, grants and business networks.

Originality/value – ~~This paper shows the value of paying analytical attention to women's groups as a means of in overcoming contextual difficulties in rural entrepreneurship. Concretely the paper illustrates the added-value of conducting women's rural entrepreneurship studies in low-income countries. There is vast knowledge on the influence of the context on women's engagement in rural entrepreneurship. However, the~~ ~~The~~ question of how rural women navigate the contextual inhibitors to their engagements in rural-entrepreneurship remains largely unanswered. ~~This paper shows the value of analytical attention to women groups in overcoming contextual difficulties.~~

Example of an abstract incrementally improving with feedback Cont 3/3.

Abstract

Purpose

This study aims to examine how women's groups help women to navigate context-related barriers to their engagement in rural entrepreneurship. The paper combines the contextualisation of entrepreneurship framework and the feminist separatist theory to describe how women's groups in patriarchal rural communities enable women to circumvent context-related barriers and actively engage in rural entrepreneurship.

Design/methodology/approach

Based on a case study of 12 women's groups engaged in paddy farming, rice processing and marketing in rural Tanzania, this study draws on semi-structured interviews with 46 women, four focus group discussions, four in-depth key informant interviews and non-participant observation.

Findings

Rural women face unique context-related challenges that hinder them from effectively participating in rural entrepreneurship. Specifically, limited access to farmlands and profitable markets, lack of business networks, limited time, poverty and insufficient financial resources constrain women's engagement in entrepreneurship. To overcome these contextual barriers, rural women have organised themselves into groups to gain access to business services, business-related training, grants and business networks.

Research limitations/implications

This study contributes to the existing literature on contextualising entrepreneurship by focussing on how rural contexts may constrain women's entrepreneurial engagement while showing how women respond to contextual barriers that enable them to participate in rural entrepreneurship.

Practical implications

This study shows that women with low education can pursue rural entrepreneurship if they are supported through training and access to networks. This will support the performance of these groups of women.

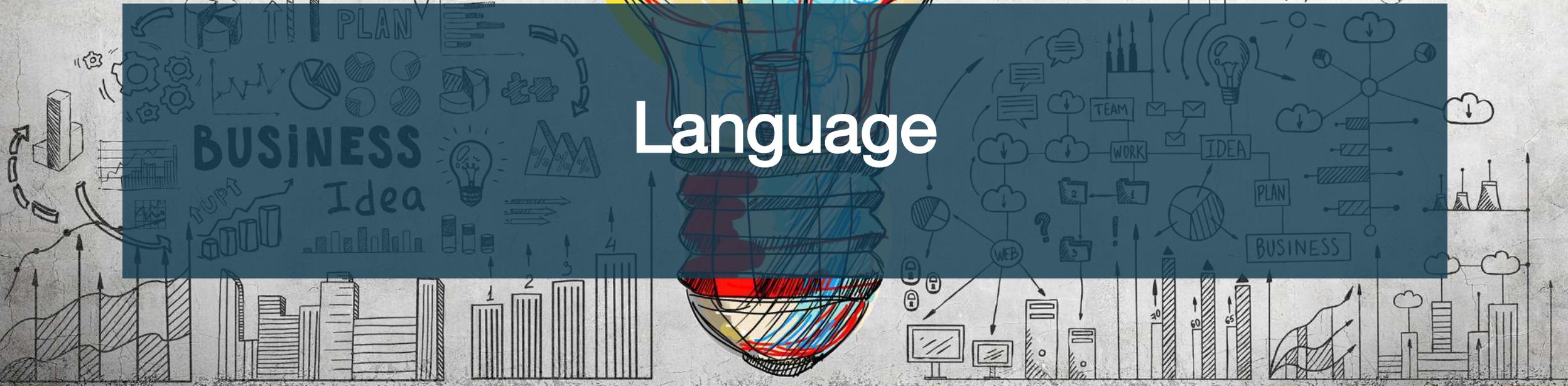
Originality/value

This study offers new insights into the role of women's groups in navigating gender-related constraints that hinder women from participating in rural entrepreneurship within the patriarchal context of low-income countries. Thus, new perceptions for the gender and rural entrepreneurship theory and the policy implications thereof are proffered.

Keywords: Context | Rural entrepreneurship | Khama Rural | low-income countries | Shinyanga Rural | Women's groups

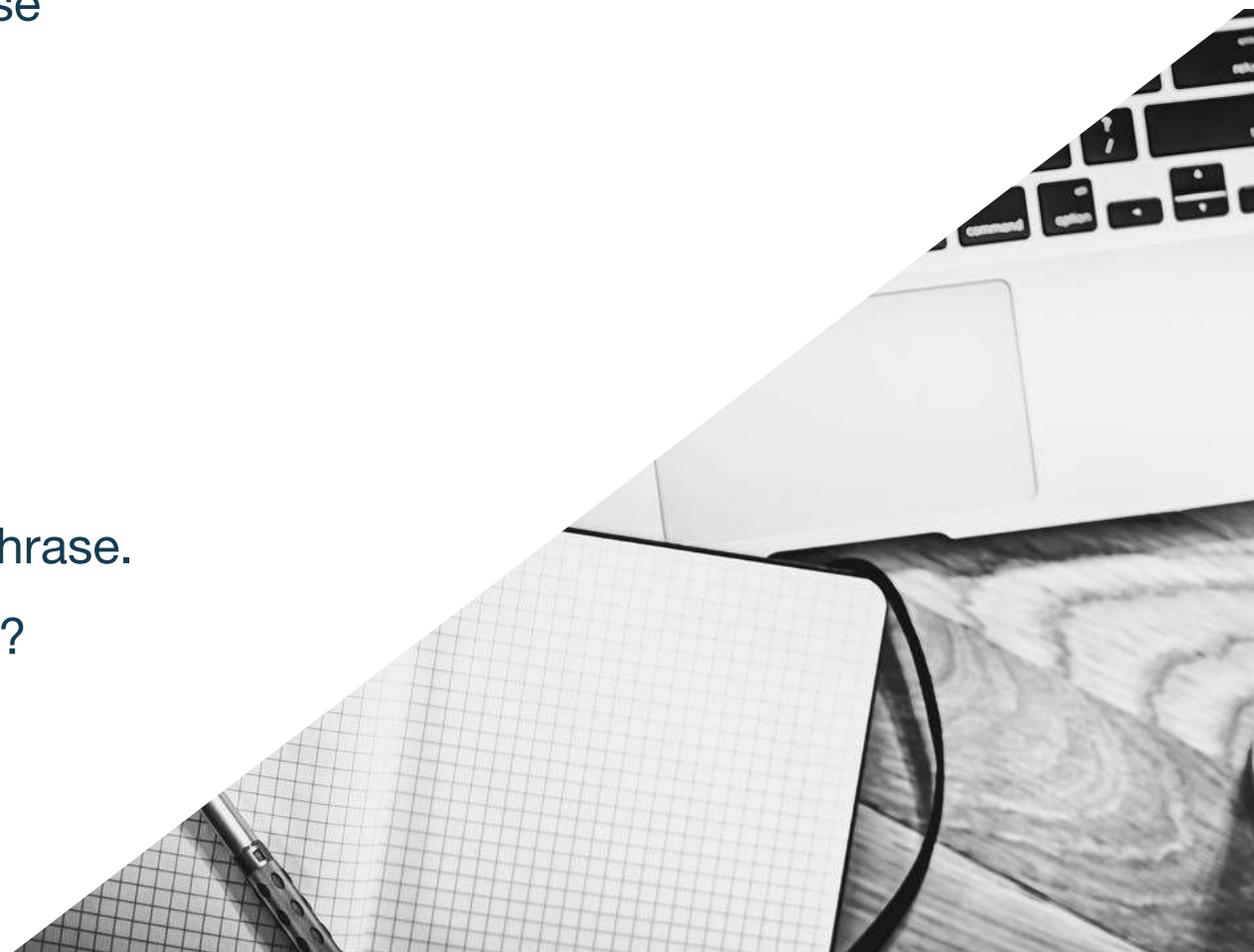


Language



Writing tips and best practice

- Cut down on unnecessary words ~~that are not needed~~ in a sentence
- Follow the structure of your paper, but condense
- Use simple, clear, accessible language
- Avoid long sentences and unexplained jargon
- Pick a tense and stick with it
- Select keywords carefully
- Explain what you found, not just what you did
- Word limit: Write and then cut down words/rephrase.
- Read your writing out loud - how does it sound?
- Read your abstract to non-researchers



How much information does the abstract give about	None	A bit	A lot	Suggested number of words (for a 300 word abstract)
Other people's work and the focus of previous research literature?				No more than 50-60 words
What is distinctive to your own theoryposition or intellectual approach?				At least 50 words
Your methods or data sources/datasets?				From 50 words minimum to 150 maximum
Your bottom-line findings (i.e. what 'new facts' have you found? Or what key conclusions do you draw?				As many words as possible within your limit
The value-added or originality of your work within this field?				At least 30 to 50 words

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/06/20/essential-guide-writing-good-abstracts/>

Titles

- Critically important.
- For publishing prospects: Will be the first thing that editors or reviewers see - often when looking at hundreds.
- For post-publishing: May be the only thing that key audiences see i.e. media, researchers, practitioners.

Should:

- Summarize the article content: Be simple, precise, and catchy.
- Improve indexing of the article: Contain descriptive keywords pertaining to the research
- Trigger the curiosity of the reader

This can be done using different grammatical devices, separately or sometimes together:

- **Descriptive titles**, which describe what the paper is about (e.g. 'Investigating the role of NIH grants on shaping the research agenda in Africa')
- **Declarative titles** make a statement about the results presented in the paper (e.g. 'NIH grants shape the short-term research agenda in Africa')
- **Interrogative titles**, which pose a question (e.g. 'What is on sale in Accra-based supermarkets?')
- **Compound titles**, which may combine several of the above separated by colons or question marks (e.g. 'What is on sale? Healthiness of foods on promotional-flyers of Accra-Based Supermarkets').

Keep in mind disciplinary norms!

Breakout activity

Develop a title for an abstract

Sample abstract

Land size is an important equity concern for the design of ‘nutrition-sensitive’ agricultural interventions. We unpack some of the pathways between land and nutrition using a cross-sectional baseline survey data set of 4,480 women from 148 clusters from the ‘Upscaling Participatory Action and Videos for Agriculture and Nutrition’ trial in Keonjhar district in Odisha, India. Variables used are household In-land size owned (exposure) and maternal dietary diversity score out of 10 food groups and body mass index (BMI; kg/m²) (outcomes); and mediators investigated are production diversity score, value of agricultural production, and indicators for women's empowerment (decision-making in agriculture, group participation, work-free time and land ownership). We assessed mediation using a non-parametric potential outcomes framework method. Land size positively affects maternal dietary diversity scores [β 0.047; 95% confidence interval (CI) (0.011, 0.082)] but not BMI. Production diversity, but not value of production, accounts for 17.6% of total effect mediated. We observe suppression of the effect of land size on BMI, with no evidence of a direct effect for either of the agricultural mediators but indirect effects of β -0.031 [95% CI (-0.048, -0.017)] through production diversity and β -0.047 [95% CI (-0.075, -0.021)] through value of production. An increase in land size positively affects women's decision-making, which in turn negatively affects maternal BMI. The positive effect of work-free time on maternal BMI is suppressed by the negative effect of household land size on work-free time. Agriculture interventions must consider land quality, women's decision-making and implications for women's workload in their design.

Breakout group responses:

1. Linking Agriculture and Women Empowerment to Nutrition: A cross-sectional Study from Orissa
2. An increase in land size positively affects women's decision-making, ~~which in turn~~ and ~~negatively~~ affects maternal BMI
3. What are the determinants to empowering the rural women for healthy living?
4. Household land holding size: a critical factor for healthy diet consumption among women in India
5. Cross sectional study to investigate land effecting maternal dietary diversity
6. 'Influence of land size on the nutritional status of women in Keonjhar district, India'
7. Performance of nutrition sensitive agricultural intervention on maternal dietary options
8. Land to nutrition pathways: Evidence from Orissa, India
9. Achieving land size equity: considerations for nutrition sensitive agriculture interventions targeting women
10. Agricultural productivity as it affect the nutritional status of women in Odisha, India



Discussing the titles

References (and useful resources)

- <https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/writing-an-abstract>
- Day, Robert A., and Barbara Gastel. How to write and publish a scientific paper. Cambridge University Press.
- [Your essential 'how-to' guide to writing good abstracts](#)
- [Workshop: Writing an Abstract for a Paper, Talk, or Poster. ASA, CSSA, SSSA Annual Meetings 2013](#)
- [Writing a great abstract: tips from an Editor](#)
- Tullu M. S. (2019). Writing the title and abstract for a research paper: Being concise, precise, and meticulous is the key. Saudi journal of anaesthesia, 13(Suppl 1), S12–S17.
https://doi.org/10.4103/sja.SJA_685_18
- Prem (2017): https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-4720-6_3
- Enago (2021): <https://www.enago.com/academy/do-declarative-titles-in-research-articles-yield-increased-readership/>

	Full title in quotes	Three or four most distinctive title words
How many items show up?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None (good). - Many (poor). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None (bad). - Very few (bad) - Modest number(good) - Lots and lots (bad) - it's an inverted U curve here.
How do most of the other references or items that show up relate to your topic and subject matter?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Very close (good). -Close (OK). -Remote (bad). -Completely different topic (very bad).
Does the search show that you are using terms, phrases or acronyms that		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have the same meaning as you are using (good).- Or have a number of different meanings from your sense (bad)