

The Abstract Section of The Journal of the A. O. C. S.

WHY does the Journal have an abstract section, what is the policy with regard to the content and form of the abstracts, and what are its problems of the future?

Abstracts are, we believe, the backbone of research for they not only tell one what is being done and what has been done, but they very often serve as a source of new ideas and new avenues of approach to old problems. It is our aim to make readily available the current literature on fats, oils, detergents, and waxes, by collecting in one place all the available abstracts on these topics. About half of the abstracts we are interested in can be found in two sections of Chemical Abstracts; but the other half are quite widely scattered, and this is one reason we believe our abstract section serves a useful purpose.



D. E. Whyte

The two greatest barriers to anyone trying to keep up with the current literature are time and language. Trying to locate articles of specific interest by covering the immense volume of scientific literature which appears regularly every month has become a practical impossibility, not only because of the time required, but also because versatility in more than a dozen languages would be required; and few of us are so trained that we can read a variety of foreign languages with speed and clarity. The abstracts which are published in this magazine overcome both the time and language barriers.

The question has been raised at various times as to whether the costs of the abstracts justify their continuance. We feel that abstracts are money in your pocket, for where else can you obtain the services of five expert abstractors to cull and synopsize the literature which is of particular interest to you for such a small fee as \$5 per year, which is the subscription price of this journal? It is of interest to note that a commercial establishment which provides a somewhat similar abstract service charges \$60 per year.

THE type of abstract which we are producing might well be called a hybrid for it lies somewhere between an informative abstract and an indicative abstract. Horace stated a creed which we have tried to apply to our abstracting, "*Est brevitae opus, ut currat sententia*" (Terseness is needed that the thought may run free). The indicative abstract is usually short and written solely for the purpose of enabling its readers to decide whether they wish to read the original paper. The informative abstract is quite complete for it usually summarizes rather fully the experimental details, all new compounds prepared, and all the conclusions reached. Our aim in abstracting is to report in the briefest form possible what the abstractors consider to be the most important phases of the paper. Some people may ask why aren't the abstracts just indicative? The answer, of course, is that for many of our readers we are their only abstract source, and for this reason we try to have the abstracts contain all the important information without at the same time deviating from our purpose.

We want it firmly understood that we make no attempt at completeness as does Chemical Abstracts or British Abstracts. We are not in competition with those very fine abstracting magazines, and we do not plan to be. It should be noted that in order to make the coverage of our field as complete as possible we obtain a number of our abstracts from Chemical Abstracts and British Abstracts, to whom we are truly grateful for their kind permission to use their material, for we do not have the facilities or man-power necessary to abstract the multitude of minor journals which they cover so well. In using their abstracts, we quite often abstract their abstract so that its content will conform with our general usage.

ANOTHER purpose of most abstracting services is to serve as a reference source for the collection of information on a particular subject. This would involve the preparation of yearly and decennial indices and the use of strictly informative abstracts. We feel that this function is very adequately taken care of by Chemical Abstracts and British Abstracts, and we do not propose to duplicate their fine work. Our abstracts are designed only to keep people up to date on current developments.

Promptness of appearance of abstracts is something to be desired, and with the small number of personnel involved in our operation it is relatively easy. We expect that abstracts of papers from journals which we receive regularly will appear approximately two months after these journals become available. This is about the absolute minimum time for we must allow for abstracting, editing, setting up, and checking the proof, finally printing and mailing.

If the volume of scientific research continues to increase in the next 10 years at the same rate that it has in the past 10 years, the abstract section will, we believe, reach such proportions as to present a very grave problem to the Society. This increasing volume will create the need for more abstractors and a continued enlargement of the section in the journal devoted to abstracts with concomitant increases in printing and other costs. Whether the subscribers are willing to shoulder this additional cost or whether this may require the Society to resort strictly to indicative abstracts we don't know, but it is something which will need to be considered.

The regular compilation of the abstracts is the work of a very fine group of abstractors, whom I should like to compliment. It is the excellence of their work and their efficiency which makes the abstract section what it is. We hope that you will be kind enough to write to us if you have any "brickbats" or even an occasional "bouquet."

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