



ABSTRACT MAKEOVER

Here is an example of an abstract makeover that aims to meet two criteria:

1. Be as **informative** as possible about the original contributions of the article.
2. Be as **accessible** as possible to non-expert audiences.

The article I chose for this abstract makeover was published in one of the top journals in philosophy, *Ethics*. It is high quality work from an established scholar, and the abstract is brief and appropriate for its context. The article is relatively technical, so it makes a great example to show what is possible when we translate dense scholarship for non-expert readers. My makeover is not a critique of the [original work](#), but a new format for it—a transformation that can show scholars one example of how they might package their research to reach a broader audience. The abstracts I provide here are longer than the original, which makes it easier to make them more accessible. The journal accepts abstracts up to 250 words, and the original abstract is just 86 words.

The full write up of this makeover can be found on the [Writing is Thinking blog](#).

EDITING CAVEAT

An editor's comments and changes are *suggestions* for an author to accept, reject, or modify. Only the author can determine if the edited text says what they meant for it to say. But my versions of the abstract here have not been reviewed by the article's author for accuracy.

I did my best as a careful reader to get the ideas in the article right--to try to translate the technical language to more accessible prose and to supply concrete examples of of the article's concepts. It is possible that my examples are all wrong and my brief summaries of the theories are incomplete. If this were my work with a client, it would go back to the author to give them the chance to say, "Yes! That's it" or "No. That's not what I meant at all."



BEFORE

Original Abstract for the article: "Rational Internalism" (86 words)
written by the article's author and published alongside the article in *Ethics*

"I describe and motivate Rational Internalism, a principle concerning the relationship between motivating reasons (which explain actions) and normative reasons (which justify actions). I use this principle to construct a novel argument against Objectivist theories of normative reasons, which hold that facts about normative reasons can be analyzed in terms of an independently specified class of normative or evaluative facts. I then argue for an alternative theory of normative reasons, the Reasoning View, which is consistent with both Rational Internalism and one standard motivation for Objectivism."

AFTER

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Example of an accessible abstract for the article: "Rational Internalism"
Abstract written by Heather Wallace, *Writing is Thinking* (474 words)

We use reasons both to explain why we act ("motivating reasons") and to justify our actions, i.e. show that we have good reasons for what we do ("normative reasons"). The Internalism Requirement, a principle from action theory, describes the relationship between motivating and normative reasons. The Internalism Requirement states that if a reason cannot explain why you acted the way you did, it cannot justify your action. (For example, imagine trying to justify going over the speed limit because your speeding resulted in you avoiding a terrible accident. If you can't imagine honestly explaining, "I was speeding because I thought there was going to be a random bad accident here," then the fact that you avoided the accident cannot justify your speeding.)

(Continued on the next page.)

AFTER

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Example of an accessible (long) abstract for the article: "[Rational Internalism](#)"

Abstract written by Heather Wallace, Writing is Thinking

Continued from the previous page.

In this paper, I define and motivate a new interpretation of the Internalism Requirement, which I call “Rational Internalism.” Rational Internalism is a technical explanation of why the Internalism Requirement is true. It formalizes the relationship of normative and motivating reasons in terms of facts and mental states. Facts serve as normative reasons, and they can count in favor of an action (for example: the fact that I am driving an ambulance can count in favor of me speeding). Mental states serve as motivating reasons, and they can rationalize action (for example: I believe a patient is having an emergency, so I am speeding). Rational Internalism states that there is a crucial relationship between what it is for a fact to “count in favor” and what it is for a mental state to “rationalize.”

Rational Internalism helps us assess competing theories about normative reasons—theories about what kinds of reasons can justify our actions. Subjective theories hold that the source of all normative reasons is in a person’s desire or motivations. Non-Subjectivist theories of normative reasons claim that there are objective sources of value that can provide normative reasons to everyone, including people who are not motivated by these reasons. Scholars have argued that the Internalism Requirement is consistent with Subjectivist but not non-Subjectivist views. First, I show how Rational Internalism can be used to argue against one type of non-Subjectivist views: Objectivist theories. Then I show how Rational Internalism paves the way for a new view of normative reasons that is both consistent with the Internalism Requirement and is compatible with the existence of objective values. I call this view the “Reasoning View.” The Reasoning View defines both normative reasons and motivating reasons in terms of the norms of good reasoning.

We should prefer a theory of normative reasons that shows us what normative reasons and motivating reasons have in common, such that normative reasons are always apt to be motivating reasons—i.e. a “unifying theory.” Using Rational Internalism, I produce the first unifying theory of the Internalism Requirement—the Reasoning View—that is consistent with the existence of objective values.



SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

BEFORE

**Original Abstract for the article: "Rational Internalism" (86 words)
written by the article's author and published alongside the article in *Ethics***

"I describe and motivate Rational Internalism, a principle concerning the relationship between motivating reasons (which explain actions) and normative reasons (which justify actions). I use this principle to construct a novel argument against Objectivist theories of normative reasons, which hold that facts about normative reasons can be analyzed in terms of an independently specified class of normative or evaluative facts. I then argue for an alternative theory of normative reasons, the Reasoning View, which is consistent with both Rational Internalism and one standard motivation for Objectivism."

AFTER

SHORT ABSTRACT

**Example of an accessible abstract for the article: "Rational Internalism"
written by Heather Wallace, Writing is Thinking (195 words)**

We use reasons to explain why we act ("motivating reasons") and to justify our actions ("normative reasons"). The Internalism Requirement states that if a reason cannot explain why you acted the way you did, it cannot justify your action. I define and motivate a new interpretation of the Internalism Requirement, "Rational Internalism." Rational Internalism formalizes the relationship of normative and motivating reasons in terms of facts and mental states: there is a crucial relationship between what it is for a fact to "count in favor" of an action and what it is for a mental state to "rationalize" an action.

Rational Internalism helps us assess competing theories about normative reasons. We should prefer a unifying theory of normative reasons that shows us what normative reasons and motivating reasons have in common such that normative reasons are always apt to be motivating reasons. Using Rational Internalism, I present the first unifying theory of the Internalism Requirement that is also consistent with the existence of objective values—values that do not depend on a person's desires and motivations. The "Reasoning View" defines both normative reasons and motivating reasons in terms of the process of good practical reasoning.