SemCSE: Semantic Contrastive Sentence Embeddings Using LLM-Generated Summaries For Scientific Abstracts

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Abstract

We introduce SemCSE, an unsupervised method for learning semantic embeddings of scientific texts. Building on recent advances in contrastive learning for text embeddings, our approach leverages LLM-generated summaries of scientific abstracts to train a model that positions semantically related summaries closer together in the embedding space. This resulting objective ensures that the model captures the true semantic content of a text, in contrast to traditional citation-based approaches that do not necessarily reflect semantic similarity. To validate this, we propose a novel benchmark designed to assess a model's ability to understand and encode the semantic content of scientific texts, demonstrating that our method enforces a stronger semantic separation within the embedding space. Additionally, we evaluate SemCSE on the comprehensive SciRepEval benchmark for scientific text embeddings, where it achieves state-of-the-art performance among models of its size, thus highlighting the benefits of a semantically focused training approach.

1 Introduction

The rapid growth in scientific publications (Bornmann et al., 2021) presents significant challenges for researchers in navigating the expanding body of knowledge. To address this, various embedding methods have been developed, both specifically for the scientific domain (Cohan et al., 2020a; Ostendorff et al., 2022) and for text retrieval in general (Sturua et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2025). These methods transform texts into dense vector representations, enabling efficient assessment of semantic relatedness through vector comparison, thus supporting a range of downstream applications, including classification, clustering, and search (Subakti et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2023), as well as modern applications like retrieval-augmented generation (Gao et al., 2024).

The scientific domain in particular provides an exceptionally rich environment for both training and deploying embedding models, as, on the one hand, paper titles and abstracts are widely available and effectively encapsulate the core content of a publication, thus making them especially valuable for tasks like literature search and retrieval. On the other hand, this potential is further enhanced by the presence of citation links, which have long been recognized as a useful supervision signal indicating relatedness of scientific papers (Cohan et al., 2020a; Ostendorff et al., 2022; Mysore et al., 2022).

While citations can serve as a useful proxy for semantic similarity, they introduce significant noise due to several factors, including 1) varying citation practices across disciplines (Hjørland and Albrechtsen, 1995), 2) frequent citation of popular foundational works irrespective of their direct relevance, 3) interdisciplinary research including citations to fields with little thematic connection, and 4) citations made out of professional courtesy rather than genuine relatedness (Pasternack, 1969). Moreover, the absence of a citation does not necessarily indicate a lack of thematic overlap, as researchers may simply be unaware of each other's work.

To address these limitations, we propose SemCSE - a novel, fully unsupervised method for embedding scientific abstracts that emphasizes semantic content over external signals such as citation patterns. Our approach leverages a large language model to generate summarizing sentences that capture the core semantic information of scientific abstracts. These summaries are then used to train an embedding model to place summaries of the same abstract at nearby locations in the embedding space while pushing apart unrelated ones, thus effectively encouraging the model to learn robust and semantically meaningful representations of scientific texts.

A key advantage of our method is its unsupervised nature, which enables fast and scalable adaptation to new domains without the need for labeled

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data, thus contrasting supervised approaches that rely on large annotated datasets (Singh et al., 2023) or large citation networks (Ostendorff et al., 2022).

A central contribution of our work is the paradigm shift from reliance on citation-based signals to a direct focus on semantic similarity. As existing benchmarks do not adequately capture this distinction, we introduce a novel benchmark specifically designed to assess a model's ability to encode the true semantic content of scientific texts. Our results show that SemCSE outperforms existing models trained using citation-based supervision, achieving a significantly stronger semantic separation in the embedding space. Furthermore, we validate the broader effectiveness of our approach by evaluating it on the comprehensive SciRepEval benchmark for scientific text representations (Singh et al., 2023), where SemCSE achieves state-of-the-art performance among models of comparable size.

2 Related Work

Structured Representations of Texts are widely adopted for tasks like assessing semantic textual similarity (Li and Li, 2024), question answering (Karpukhin et al., 2020), document retrieval (Tang et al., 2021) and clustering (Hadifar et al., 2019), and have been trained either using explicit supervision (e.g., (Reimers and Gurevych, 2019)) or with unsupervised objectives (e.g., Wu et al. (2020), Gao et al. (2021), Huang et al. (2021)).

Scientific Document Embeddings are a natural extension of this general development, and are commonly used to embed scientific papers for tasks like document retrieval (Kanakia et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2023), domain analysis and visualization (Lv et al., 2024), or as pretraining strategy for creating domain-specific transformer models (Brinner et al., 2025). While simple methods leverage basic word-frequency information (Achakulvisut et al., 2016; Meijer et al., 2021), recent approaches train neural network embedding models, for example by using an unsupervised contrastive objective that enforces similar embeddings for different parts of the same document (Tan et al., 2023), or by using explicit supervision in the form of classification and regression tasks (Singh et al., 2023).

In contrast to these examples, most embedding models for scientific texts rely on citation relationships as a proxy for semantic relatedness between papers, thus enforcing similar embeddings for papers that share a citation link. Bhagavatula et al. (2018) use this to train text representations based on weighted word vectors, while Cohan et al. (2020b) use the same concept for training a transformer embedding model, with Ostendorff et al. (2022) improving the selection of negative samples using a citation network embedding space.

More recent developments have focused on creating **Task-Specific Embeddings**, thus creating multiple embeddings for a given document encoding different aspects, or creating embeddings specifically suitable for certain tasks (Mysore et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2025).

A different line of research instead focuses on leveraging **Synthetic Data For Embedding Models**, which was proven to be effective both for use during training (Lee et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025) or inference (Frank and Afli, 2024; Thirukovalluru and Dhingra, 2025). Notably, the use of LLM-generated synthetic data for training embedding models remains unexplored in the scientific domain. Further, existing research focuses on obtaining high-quality training data, usually by using large proprietary LLMs, which contrasts our method that proves to be effective by leveraging small LLMs as tools for simple semantics-preserving data augmentation.

3 Method

We propose SemCSE, a simple contrastive learning scheme designed to train a text embedding model with a strong emphasis on accurate semantic representation. While our experiments focus on the scientific domain, we believe our approach is broadly applicable. Therefore, we present the method in a general form here and provide domain-specific details and adaptations in Section 4.

Our embedding approach is based on a dataset of texts representing the target domain, denoted as $\mathcal{A} = \{A_1, A_2, ..., A_n\}$. Using this dataset, the first step in our training pipeline involves using an LLM to generate multiple summarizing sentences for each text in the training set, resulting in a dataset $\mathcal{S} = \{(s_{1,1}, s_{1,2}, ...), (s_{2,1}, s_{2,2}, ...), ..., (s_{n,1}, s_{n,2}, ...)\}$. This dataset is subsequently used to train the embedding model via a triplet loss, encouraging summaries of the same text to be mapped to nearby locations in the embedding space.

Formally, for each index i_j within a batch $\mathcal{B} = \{i_1, ..., i_{|\mathcal{B}|}\}$ of sampled indices, we randomly select two summarizing sentences for the corresponding text T_{i_j} and denote them as $s_{j,1}$ and $s_{j,2}$. We then embed them individually using our model M:

$$e_{j,1} = M(s_{j,1})$$
$$e_{j,2} = M(s_{j,2})$$

For each pair of matching summaries, we define $e_{j,1}$ as the *anchor* e_a and $e_{j,2}$ as the *positive* e_+, and sample a third, random, summary as *negative* e_-. On these triples, we compute the following triplet loss (Hoffer and Ailon, 2015):

$$\mathcal{L}(e_\mathrm{a}, e_+, e_-) = \mathrm{relu}(d(e_a, e_+) - d(e_a, e_-) + 1)$$

Here, m is a margin hyperparameter, and d is a distance function (e.g., Euclidean distance, which is used in our experiments). This loss encourages the model to embed the anchor and positive at least one unit closer together than the distance between the anchor and negative. Thus, the model learns to create embeddings that capture the semantic content of each sentence to ensure that semantically similar summaries are positioned close together in the embedding space. The final loss for the entire batch is then formulated as:

$$\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{|\mathcal{B}|} \sum_{i \in \mathcal{B}} \frac{1}{|\mathcal{B}| - 1} \sum_{j \in B, j \neq i} \mathcal{L}(e_{i,1}, e_{i,2}, e_{j,2})$$

This formulation creates $|\mathcal{B}| - 1$ triples for each positive pair by selecting each positive from other pairs as negative. This improves training significantly since, as the model improves, many triples will yield a zero loss and incorporating a larger number of triples increases the likelihood of obtaining informative gradient signals.

In addition to the base objective, we apply a weak L2 regularization to the embeddings to encourage a more compact embedding space.

3.1 A Comparative Analysis

Contrastive loss formulations have proven highly effective for training embedding models, with key insights from Wang and Isola (2020) being that their success largely stems from promoting uniformity - i.e., encouraging embeddings to be evenly distributed in the embedding space to allow for better disambiguation - as well as from promoting alignment, meaning that semantically similar inputs are placed close together.

While alignment is typically enforced by using positive pairs from supervised datasets, Gao et al. (2021) created an unsupervised contrastive loss by using the same sentence as both the anchor and the positive, thus mainly focusing on improving uniformity through pushing unrelated samples apart. Notably, they show that introducing variance between the anchor and positive embeddings - enabled through dropout in the forward pass - is key for maintaining alignment, which is otherwise not promoted due to the lack of related positive pairs.

Our own experiments support this analysis, since we observed that model performance using unsupervised SimCSE peaked after about 1,000 steps, suggesting that the training process quickly saturates if uniformity is sufficiently improved, and that alignment is not further promoted through meaningful information from related samples.

In contrast, our proposed method introduces a more semantically informative training signal by using related but clearly distinct summarizing sentences created by leveraging the stochasticity of autoregressive generation. These summaries serve as anchor-positive pairs, thus presenting a more challenging learning task that requires the model to identify the shared meaning across diverse surface forms, ultimately preserving alignment within this broader space of semantically related sentences.

It is important to note that the concepts of alignment and uniformity, as defined by Wang and Isola (2020), are formally grounded in a hyperspherical embedding space induced by the use of cosine similarity and thus do not directly transfer to the unconstrained Euclidean space employed in our study. Nevertheless, the underlying principles of encouraging the separation of unrelated embeddings for easier disambiguation and bringing related inputs closer together remain conceptually applicable. For this reason, we perform an empirical analysis of the effect of our training scheme on anisotropy of the embedding space in Appendix B.2.

4 Model Training

We investigate the applicability of our training scheme to scientific texts, thus creating an embedding model suitable for tasks like literature search.

4.1 Dataset

As training data, we utilize a collection of corpora from the SciRepEval benchmark (Singh et al., 2023), a large-scale evaluation suite for scientific text embedding models. From these corpora, we sample 350K paper titles and abstracts spanning a variety of domains (for details, see Appendix A).

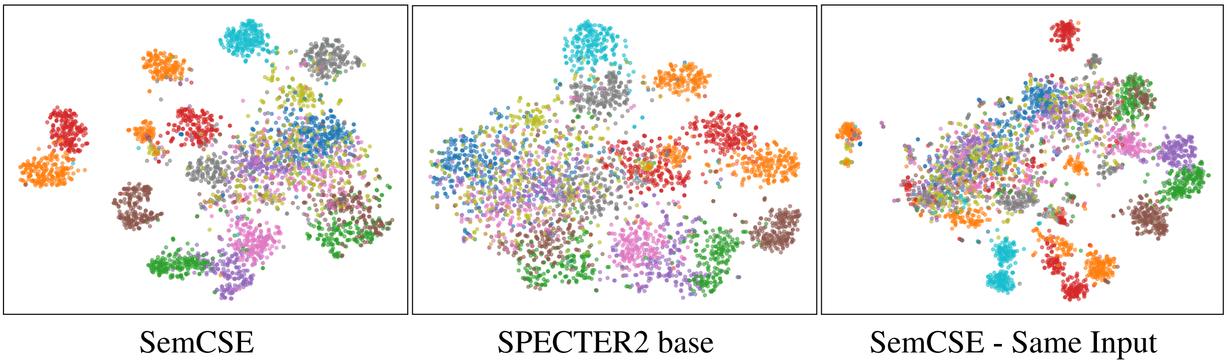

Figure 1: A t-SNE visualization of embeddings generated for scientific papers from the SciDocs MAG dataset (Cohan et al., 2020b), with points colored according to their assigned topic labels.

Our method requires multiple summarizing sentences per sample, which we generate by concatenating title and abstract and processing them with Llama-3-8B (Grattafiori et al., 2024). Specifically, we append one of five predefined prompts (e.g., "A comprehensive summary for our work would be that") to the abstract and generate three continuations, thus effectively summarizing the abstract. To create a more challenging matching task, these prompts are designed to extract different types of information, including the general topic of the research, comprehensive summaries or key findings.

We also performed preliminary experiments with summaries created by chat LLMs, but found that these performed slightly worse. We hypothesize that the continuation-based approach adheres more closely to the input data distribution, generating sentences that more naturally resemble those found in scientific abstracts. A full list of prompts and other training details are provided in Appendix A.2, while a discussion about the effect of summary quality is presented in Appendix B.1.

4.2 Model Training

As base model within our experiments, we use a pretrained SciDeBERTa model (Kim et al., 2023).

While we only use generated summaries as anchors, we increase variance within the positives by also sampling paper titles or sentences from the abstracts in 15% and 35% of cases, respectively. This forces the model to learn meaningful relationships between different representations of the same document, leading to a deeper semantic understanding. This alteration is not applied to the anchors to ensure that one representation of the text captures the underlying semantics comprehensively.

4.3 Baselines

For our evaluation we compare SemCSE to a diverse set of embedding models, including those specifically designed for scientific texts in the form of SciBERT (Beltagy et al., 2019), SciDeBERTa (Kim et al., 2023), SPECTER (Cohan et al., 2020a), SciNCL (Ostendorff et al., 2022), and SPECTER2 (Singh et al., 2023), as well as several state-of-the-art general-purpose embedding models commonly used for document retrieval. These include all-MiniLM-L6-v2[1], jina-embeddings-v2-base-en (Günther et al., 2023), jina-embeddings-v3 (Sturua et al., 2024), NvEmbed-V2 (Lee et al., 2025), and RoBERTa-SimCSE (Gao et al., 2021).

Since we focus on evaluating a model's ability to create generally applicable and task-independent semantic embeddings, we do not use domain-specific prompts that allow for task-specific embeddings (e.g., for NvEmbed), or task-specific adapters (e.g., for SPECTER2), and instead rely on the component for general semantic embedding.

5 Evaluating Semantic Embedding Capabilities

5.1 Generalization to Longer Texts

Since our model is trained exclusively on individual sentences - i.e., summaries, paper titles, or randomly sampled sentences from abstracts - it is essential to evaluate its ability to generalize to longer texts and capture their overall semantics.

To this end, we consider the validation dataset comprising 900 title-abstract pairs and corresponding paper summaries. We assess performance using a ranking-based retrieval metric: For a given summary, the model must identify the matching title-abstract pair from a pool of 900 candidates

[1] https://huggingface.co/sentence-transformers/all-MiniLM-L6-v2

Model	Parameters	Title-Abstr. ↓	Abstr.-Segments ↓	Query ↓	Clustering ↑	Perf. ↑
SciBERT	109M	807.74	214.37	213.45	0.569	0.000
SciDeBERTa	183M	1479.09	861.55	2465.26	0.460	0.000
SPECTER	109M	10.25	12.23	2.18	0.692	0.119
SciNCL	109M	5.68	7.35	2.29	0.702	0.357
SPECTER2 base	109M	4.52	5.10	1.17	0.666	0.553
SPECTER2 proximity	110M	5.34	5.80	1.46	0.666	0.395
all-MiniLM-L6-v2	22M	3.09	8.19	1.11	0.730	0.771
Jina-v2	137M	3.29	8.77	1.29	0.703	0.600
Jina-v3	572M	3.45	6.96	**1.01**	0.719	0.783
RoBERTa SimCSE	355M	23.71	44.24	8.92	0.696	0.116
NvEmbed-V2	7.9B	3.38	3.84	1.02	0.721	0.866
SemCSE (Ours)	183M	**2.47**	**2.68**	1.23	**0.739**	**0.925**

Table 1: Results for evaluating SemCSE and baseline models on the semantic embedding benchmark. The best scores are bold, while second-best are underlined.

based on embedding proximity. We report the average rank at which the correct match is retrieved, with 1 being optimal and 900 the worst.

Our model achieves an average rank of 1.542, indicating a capability to produce semantically meaningful embeddings for both short and long texts that supports precise semantic retrieval. When using only the title or only the abstract instead of their concatenation, performance drops to 3.0 and 1.801, respectively. These results confirm that the model does not rely solely on the opening sentence and is capable of effectively embedding longer and more complex texts than those seen during training. Moreover, the results highlight the model's ability to embed diverse forms of scientific text - summaries, titles, and abstracts - into a unified semantic space.

5.2 Semantic Embedding Benchmark

Building on the analyses from the previous section, we introduce a benchmark specifically designed to evaluate a model's ability to capture the precise semantic content of scientific texts. While existing benchmarks such as SciRepEval (Section 6) include tasks like citation prediction, same-author identification, and citation count estimation, these tasks often do not evaluate a model's semantic embedding capabilities. For example, citation-based links do not necessarily imply semantic similarity (see Section 1), authors may shift research topics over time, and citation counts can vary for reasons unrelated to a paper's content

To address these limitations, we propose four tasks that more effectively evaluate a model's semantic embedding capabilities for scientific texts.

The **Title–Abstract Matching** task measures a model's ability to match a paper's title with its corresponding abstract. Titles and abstracts both serve as compressed representations of the same underlying work, albeit at different levels of detail, so that a model that captures semantic meaning should predict similar embeddings for both of these representations.

The **Abstract Segmentation Consistency** task tests the model's ability to match two halves of the same abstract. Given that scientific abstracts are highly condensed summaries of research papers, both halves should contain considerable information about the core theme of the paper, and a model that effectively captures this information should again predict similar embeddings.

The **Query Matching** task evaluates a model's ability to associate a scientific paper with a relevant search query. In this case, we pair each title-abstract pair with a search query generated using Mistral Small 3.1 (Mistral AI, 2025), a state-of-the-art 27B-parameter LLM. Despite surface-level differences, a model with strong semantic understanding should assign similar embeddings to both the query and the corresponding paper.

Similar evaluation strategies have already been proven successful in the context of passage retrieval (Vasilyev et al., 2025). To evaluate these tasks, we create a dataset consisting of 6,000 samples drawn from 12 datasets of the SciRepEval benchmark (details in Appendix A), and evaluate them using the ranking-based metric introduced in the previous section, thus reporting the average rank at which the correct match is retrieved from the candidate pool of 6,000 samples.

As a fourth task, we propose the **Semantic Clustering** task, which uses the SciDocs MAG dataset (Cohan et al., 2020a), containing 21,252 paper titles and abstracts annotated with thematic categories from the Microsoft Academic Graph. While the original benchmark proposed by Cohan et al. (2020a) focused on training a linear SVM to predict these categories from the embeddings, we argue that semantic similarity might not manifest in linear separability. Instead, we assess whether a model's embedding space naturally clusters semantically related papers. To do this, we embed each paper (title + abstract) from both the train and test sets, and - for each test sample - retrieve its five nearest neighbors from the training set. We report the proportion of these neighbors that share the same thematic category, providing a measure of how well the model organizes scientific knowledge in a semantically meaningful structure.

Finally, we compute an overall performance score by normalizing task-specific results to a scale from 0 to 1 and averaging across all tasks. For each task, the best-performing model is assigned a score of 1, the median-performing model a score of 0.5, and intermediate values are linearly interpolated, with 0 being a threshold at the lower end.

5.3 Results

The results of our semantic embedding evaluation benchmark are presented in Table 1.

Examining the title-abstract and abstract-segments matching tasks, we observe that models not explicitly trained as embedding models (i.e., SciBERT and SciDeBERTa) struggle to accurately encode the semantics of a given paper title or abstract. While training on basic citation triples substantially improves performance (SPECTER, 10.25 and 12.23), scores remain significantly higher than those achieved by models employing more advanced training strategies, for example by leveraging improved negative sampling (SciNCL, 5.68 and 7.35) or integrating supervised proximity-based datasets (SPECTER2-proximity, 5.34 and 5.80).

Interestingly, general-domain retrieval models such as Jina-v2, Jina-v3, and even the small MiniLM model, excel at the title-abstract matching task - likely caused by the close resemblance to document retrieval in general search settings - but struggle on the less familiar abstract segments matching task.

Our SemCSE model achieves state-of-the-art performance in both title-abstract matching and abstract-segments matching despite being trained solely on individual sentences, even surpassing the powerful NvEmbed-V2 model that leverages more than 43 times as many parameters. We interpret the especially unrivaled performance on the abstract-segments task as evidence of a deepened understanding of scientific texts, since each half of an abstract lacks crucial information, so that a strong performance on this task requires recovering a precise semantic representation from reduced context.

The query matching task shows improved performance compared to the other matching tasks across most models, suggesting that the LLM-generated queries are well-aligned with the semantic content of their corresponding papers, thus avoiding the challenges posed by ambiguous titles and varying abstracts. As a result, retrieval-optimized models such as Jina-v3 and NvEmbed achieve near-perfect performance, with average ranks of 1.01 and 1.02, respectively. Our SemCSE model also performs well, achieving an average rank of 1.23.

In the semantic clustering task, our SemCSE model achieves a state-of-the-art score of 0.739, outperforming all other evaluated models. The closest competitor is MiniLM (0.730), followed by the significantly larger NvEmbed model (0.721). All remaining models - including those specifically trained on scientific literature - score considerably lower. We hypothesize that this is caused by their reliance on citation triples as a supervisory signal, which might link semantically unrelated papers from different domains, ultimately leading to a less semantically-separated embedding space. This is supported by the t-SNE visualization in Figure 1, where embeddings produced by SemCSE exhibit clearly separated thematic clusters, with SPECTER2-base (the best citation-based model on the SciRepEval benchmark) showing substantially weaker topic separation.

Evaluating the overall performance score, we see a clear lead by SemCSE (0.925), with only the 7.9B parameter NvEmbed model coming remotely close (0.866), thus again highlighting the strong semantic embedding capabilities of our approach.

6 SciRepEval Evaluation

We further evaluate our model using the SciRepEval benchmark (Singh et al., 2023), which comprises 24 tasks designed to assess the performance of text embeddings across ad-hoc search, proximity, regression, and classification tasks. The task-type-

Model	Parameters	Classification	Regression	Proximity	Search	Average
SciBERT	109M	63.86	27.34	66.25	68.19	57.42
SciDeBERTa	183M	60.99	27.00	62.74	67.83	55.18
SPECTER	109M	67.73	25.37	80.05	74.89	64.28
SciNCL	109M	68.04	25.22	81.18	77.32	65.08
SPECTER2 base	109	66.95	27.75	81.10	78.42	65.46
SPECTER2 proximity	110	66.37	26.85	**81.41**	77.75	65.15
all-MiniLM-L6-v2	22M	64.04	20.06	80.74	79.63	63.05
jina-v2	137M	63.99	23.76	80.11	80.40	63.69
jina-v3	572M	65.66	24.84	79.98	80.60	64.34
RoBERTa SimCSE	355M	67.16	22.95	75.51	76.97	62.10
NvEmbed-V2	7.9B	65.62	**29.94**	81.16	**82.84**	**66.19**
SemCSE (Ours)	183M	**69.52**	27.58	80.21	78.56	65.76

Table 2: Results for evaluating SemCSE and baseline models on the SciRepEval benchmark. The best scores are bold, while second-best are underlined.

aggregated results for all models are presented in Table 2, with all individual results being included in Appendix C.

6.1 Average Performance

As seen in the context of the semantic benchmark, domain-specific models not explicitly trained for embedding tasks exhibit below-average performance. In contrast, training on citation data leads to strong overall scores, with models utilizing simple contrastive loss formulations (e.g., SPECTER, Average: 64.28) again underperforming compared to those employing more advanced training strategies, such as SciNCL (Average: 65.08).

While general-domain embedding models show strong results on some semantic matching tasks, their performance on SciRepEval is markedly lower - unsurprising given that many tasks in this benchmark are closely aligned with citation-based training signals used by domain-specific models. A notable exception is NvEmbed-V2, which achieves a state-of-the-art average score of 66.19, albeit at the cost of significantly higher computational cost.

The SemCSE model achieves the second-best overall score (65.76), outperforming other domain-specific models despite not being trained with the same citation-based supervision signals. This result strongly supports the validity of our method and further demonstrates that a greater emphasis on semantic representations can be highly beneficial.

6.2 Task-Specific Performance

Beyond aggregate scores, task-type-specific performance sheds light on the relative strengths of different pretraining approaches.

Our SemCSE model performs exceptionally well on classification tasks, achieving the highest score across all models. This is expected, as such tasks benefit most from semantically rich embeddings that facilitate clear class separation.

Regression tasks exhibit more varied outcomes across models, suggesting that no single training strategy is uniquely optimized for them.

Proximity-based tasks - many of which rely on citation information as ground truth - naturally favor models trained with citation-based supervision. Remarkably, despite not using such signals, SemCSE achieves strong performance in this category, suggesting that - although some citations may link semantically unrelated papers - citation links still broadly correlate with semantic similarity.

Finally, as expected, retrieval-optimized models outperform others on ad-hoc search tasks, even within the scientific domain.

7 Ablation

We conduct several ablations to evaluate the robustness and effectiveness of our training strategy. The corresponding results are presented in Figure 3.

We begin by assessing the impact of reduced training data. On the SciRepEval benchmark, performance remains relatively stable, maintaining scores above 65.0 even when using only 1% of the original training set. In contrast, the first two matching tasks from the semantic benchmark show a more pronounced performance drop, suggesting that exposure to a large number of samples is critical for learning high-quality semantic representations. Interestingly, performance on the clustering task remains strong even with limited data, con-

Model	Dataset	Clf.	Regr.	Prox.	Search	SRE Avg.	Title-Abstr.	Abstr.-Segments	Query	Clustering
Full	350K	69.52	27.58	80.21	78.56	65.76	2.47	2.68	1.23	0.739
Full	175K	69.26	27.19	80.36	78.54	65.67	3.40	3.21	1.29	0.732
Full	87.5K	69.01	27.39	80.35	78.58	65.65	3.35	2.63	1.24	0.731
Full	35K	69.32	27.18	80.18	77.81	65.51	3.65	3.24	1.24	0.734
Full	17.5K	68.31	27.00	80.04	78.37	65.23	3.76	3.47	1.45	0.723
Full	8.75K	68.95	27.05	79.96	76.53	65.14	4.34	3.73	1.99	0.725
Full	3.5K	68.36	27.07	79.94	76.73	65.01	5.93	4.04	2.18	0.728
Just Summaries	350K	68.78	26.89	80.21	77.51	65.28	6.04	3.52	2.11	0.732
Same Input	350K	66.59	27.23	74.29	69.94	61.48	180.01	59.86	251.46	0.645
Cosine Similarity	350K	69.76	25.88	80.63	79.33	65.72	2.84	3.17	1.13	0.735

Table 3: Results for SemCSE trained with different dataset sizes and variations of the loss function.

sistently outperforming most other models. This indicates that our training scheme is particularly effective at structuring the embedding space semantically, even under data constraints.

Next, we evaluate the importance of also using paper titles and abstract sentences as positives instead of solely relying on the generated summaries. If just summaries are used, results display a slightly reduced performance on the SciRepEval benchmark and notable performance degradation on the semantic matching tasks, underscoring the importance of training on diverse input types that reflect the actual distribution of scientific text.

Third, we explore the effect of employing different similarity metrics as basis for the embedding space. While Euclidean distance is commonly used in embedding spaces for scientific text representation, many general-purpose embedding models instead rely on cosine similarity. To evaluate the effect of choosing one over the other, we also evaluate SemCSE using a cosine-based setting by applying a standard softmax-based contrastive loss (see Appendix A.5). The resulting model achieves nearly equivalent performance on the SciRepEval benchmark, although the distribution of results across task types shifts. Specifically, classification, proximity, and search tasks show modest improvements, while regression performance declines substantially. On our proposed semantic benchmark, on the other hand, the cosine-based model still displays state-of-the-art performance, but performs slightly worse compared to the Euclidean-based model, except for the query matching task where it performs better. Ultimately, these results validate the general effectiveness of leveraging matching LLM-generated summary pairs for injecting semantic understanding into the embedding model, regardless of the specific distance metric or loss function employed.

Finally, we investigate the role of using different but semantically related inputs by training a variant of our SemCSE model using the same sentence as both anchor and positive, thus mirroring the approach of unsupervised SimCSE. In this setup, positive pairs differ only due to dropout-induced variance. This strategy has shown strong performance on general semantic textual similarity benchmarks - primarily by improving embedding space uniformity (see Section 3.1) - so that our goal is to identify the contribution of distinct summaries in our method.

The results of this setup (denoted “Same Input”) confirm that even without distinct input pairs, the model achieves substantial improvements over the SciDeBERTa base model, validating the effectiveness of the overall learning objective when combined with triplet margin loss in Euclidean space. However, performance across both the semantic and SciRepEval benchmarks remains significantly below that of the full SemCSE model. This highlights the importance of training with semantically distinct yet related inputs: identical input pairs fail to provide the semantic variation necessary for robust representation learning. This distinction is further illustrated in Figure 1, which shows markedly stronger class separation in the embedding space when the full SemCSE objective is used.

These findings reinforce the analysis in Section 3.1, which emphasizes the advantages of using semantically diverse input pairs. By replacing SimCSE’s simple data augmentation strategy with a more meaningful signal, our approach yields a more challenging training task - ultimately leading to more effective and generalizable representations for the scientific domain.

8 Conclusion

In this work, we address the challenge of learning robust semantic embeddings for scientific texts. Recognizing the limitations of traditional citation-based supervision, we propose a paradigm shift towards a semantically-focused training and evaluation paradigm, resulting in the proposal of SemCSE and a novel benchmark for semantic evaluation.

While our proposed paradigm shift is grounded in existing literature that questions the semantic relatedness of papers linked by citations, we empirically demonstrate the improved semantic representation capabilities of SemCSE on several matching tasks and both quantify and visualize this enhanced semantic structuring of the underlying embedding space on a diverse clustering dataset.

Further, the analysis of the SciRepEval benchmark shows that our method especially excels at classification tasks, which benefit from a clear semantic separation in the embedding space and thus again demonstrates the benefits of the proposed training scheme.

Finally, our ablation studies further pinpoint the use of distinct yet semantically related summary pairs as a critical component of SemCSE's success, thus demonstrating the benefit of a semantically diversified training strategy in contrast to simple data augmentation.

Ultimately, the evidence presented strongly advocates for a paradigm shift towards semantically-oriented training and evaluation for scientific text embeddings, and we believe our novel evaluation scheme itself offers valuable insights into the capabilities of existing embedding models. Beyond the scientific domain, the core unsupervised training methodology of SemCSE holds promise as a broadly applicable strategy for learning high-quality embeddings across diverse fields.

9 Limitations

A core limitation of SemCSE is the reliance on LLM-generated summaries, which has the possibility of introducing systemic biases into the embedding model, and also poses a risk of learning incorrect representations in cases of hallucinations or factual errors.

Also, while SemCSE generates semantically meaningful embeddings, the interpretability of these embeddings remains a challenge. Understanding the exact influence that specific pieces of information within abstracts have on being nearby or far apart in the embedding space is not straightforward, which could limit the model's utility in applications where interpretability is crucial.

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A Experimental Details

The code for training and evaluating our models, the best model checkpoint as well as the generated training data are available at github.com/inas-argumentation/SemCSE.

A.1 Dataset Creation

The SciRepEval benchmark comprises six datasets that are used for training, available at huggingface.co/datasets/allenai/scirepeval. We randomly select subsets of each of these datasets as training data. The following datasets are used:

- "mesh_descriptors": 50,000 samples, medical domain
- "fos": 50,000 samples, various domains
- "search": 50,000 samples, various domains

- "same_author": 50,000 samples, various domains
- "high_influence_cite": 50,000 samples, various domains
- "cite_prediction_new": 100,000 samples, various domains

The dataset used in the semantic evaluation benchmark uses 500 random samples from the train split of each of the datasets used in the SciRepEval benchmark: "relish", "high_influence_cite", "mesh_descriptors", "biomimicry", "drsm", "cite_prediction", "fos", "paper_reviewer_matching", "peer_review_score_hIndex", "same_author", "search", "tweet_mentions".

More information on these datasets can be found in (Singh et al., 2023).

A.2 Summary Generation

We use Llama-3-8B (Grattafiori et al., 2024) to generate summarizing sentences for our dataset of scientific paper titles and abstracts. To this end, we append one of the following prompts to the abstract and let the LLM generate a continuation:

- *To summarize, the key findings of our research, stated in one sentence that includes all relevant information, are that*
- *In summary, our research is concerned with*
- *In summary, a comprehensive and detailed conclusive statement would be that*
- *A comprehensive summary for our work would be that*
- *The main takeaway from our work is that*

The development of this embedding approach started in a different domain, for which we experimented with using summaries generated by a chat LLM instead of using this text-continuation method. This did lead to worse results. We hypothesize that the sentences generated by the continuation-based method adhere more closely to the input data distribution, since the LLM effectively aims at continuing the abstract in the same style as before. Additionally, the task specification is less precise, since many continuations are possible. This could lead to a higher variance in the training set, which seems to be beneficial, as indicated by our ablations.

A.3 Model Training

We evaluate our SemCSE model after every 1000 batches, with each batch containing 32 pairs of summaries/abstract sentences.

We compute the evaluation scores on a set of 900 summary-abstract pairs. The evaluation uses the same ranking-based metric introduced in Section 5.1, thus evaluating the average rank at which the correct match is retrieved.

We perform two different matching evaluations: One leverages two summaries per sample and aims at determining the matching summary score. The other takes the average embedding for both summaries and uses this to determine the matching title-abstract text.

If a new best score is achieved, the model is saved. Training is stopped as soon as the evaluation score did not decrease for 15 epochs.

We use an L2 regularizer applied to the embeddings of the anchors, which is averaged over all embeddings in the batch and weighted by a factor of $1/250$.

All ablations were trained with the same hyperparameter settings.

Hyperparameter search was performed by evaluating our model on training data for the training tasks described in (Singh et al., 2023).

The margin hyperparameter is set to 1, as is usual within most studies. This parameter does not have a notable effect, since the resulting embedding space can adhere to an arbitrarily large margin by simply scaling up the whole embedding space. Thus, precise values are not important, with only considerations being to select a value that does not cause numerical instabilities and reasonably fits to the magnitude of the embeddings of the pretrained model.

A.4 SciRepEval Evaluation

We evaluate SemCSE as well as the baselines on the SciRepEval benchmark (Singh et al., 2023). To calculate task-specific scores, we average over all metrics calculated for that task. In case a task includes full-dataset and few-shot results, all few-shot scores were averaged, and both few-shot and full-dataset results contributed evenly to the final scores.

Task-type averages were calculated by averaging over all task-specific scores for tasks of the respective type, while the complete-benchmark average was calculated by averaging over all scores for the

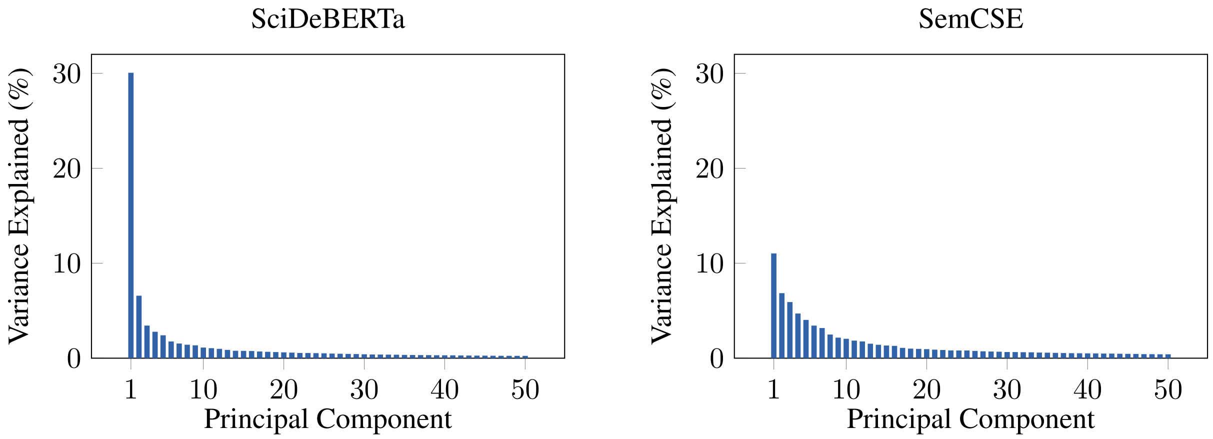

Figure 2: Variance of the SciDocs MAG embedding space explained by the first 50 principal components for the base SciDeBERTa model and the trained SemCSE model.

individual tasks.

A.5 Ablation: Cosine Similarity

We perform an ablation of SemCSE that uses cosine similarity as similarity measure instead of leveraging Euclidean distance. To this end, we use a loss formulation similar to SimCSE (Gao et al., 2021):

$$\mathcal{L} = -\frac{1}{|\mathcal{B}|}\sum_{i\in\mathcal{B}}\log\frac{\mathrm{e}^{\mathrm{sim}(e_{i,1},e_{i,2})/\tau}}{\sum_{j\in\mathcal{B}}\mathrm{e}^{\mathrm{sim}(e_{i,1},e_{j,2})/\tau}}$$

Here, sim denotes the cosine similarity and τ is a temperature hyperparameter set to 0.07, which is in line with similar work.

B Further Discussion

B.1 The Impact of Summary Quality

We use LLamA-3-8B to generate the summarizing sentences used for training. While this model performs reasonably well, it is surpassed by more recent and larger language models. This raises the question of whether the quality of generated summaries significantly affects the performance of our encoder model.

We argue that the quality of the summaries is not a substantial limiting factor, for several reasons:

1. Summarization is a relatively easy task for large language models, especially in the context of scientific abstracts, which are already highly condensed. Summarizing such short and structured texts requires minimal long-range reasoning or content synthesis, and even smaller models tend to perform well in this setting (Xu et al., 2025).

2. *If* a model misinterprets a scientific abstract, the misunderstanding is likely to be systematic across all generated summaries. This consistency means the summaries still form valid training pairs, as the relationship between them remains meaningful even if they deviate slightly from the ground truth.

3. Minor factual inconsistencies between summaries do not invalidate their semantic relatedness. For instance, if one summary of a medical abstract states that a treatment was effective while another states it was not, both still pertain to the same core topic - the effectiveness of an intervention for this disease - and should be embedded similarly, since they would both be reasonable matches for a search query related to treatment outcomes regarding this disease.

4. Our preliminary experiments using chat-based LLMs (see Appendix A) actually resulted in lower performance. In these cases, continuations that were arguably lower in quality, but higher in variability, proved more effective for training. This suggests that overly polished summaries with reduced variance may not be optimal for learning robust semantic representations.

5. The query matching task is based on LLM-generated queries created by a significantly stronger LLM. Nevertheless, our results demonstrate that the SemCSE model can

match these - likely more precise - queries to the corresponding abstracts, indicating that the model does not struggle with the different data distribution induced by the higher-quality model.

While a more detailed evaluation of how different language models affect the performance of SemCSE would be valuable, generating 15 additional summaries for 350,000 input sentences would incur a substantial computational cost. Given the likely marginal insight this would provide, we consider such an investigation unjustifiable from a sustainability perspective.

B.2 Analyzing Anisotropy

Contrastive embedding objectives have been shown to mitigate the issue of anisotropy (Gao et al., 2019, 2021) - the tendency for sentence embeddings to cluster within a narrow cone of the embedding space - an effect that has been shown to degrade the representational quality of embeddings (Li et al., 2020). Most prior analyses focus on hyperspherical embedding spaces induced by cosine similarity, where embeddings lie on the unit sphere and can only be distinguished by their angular separation. In this setting, a uniform distribution on the sphere is crucial for effective representation learning, as distances from the origin are no longer informative.

In Euclidean spaces, by contrast, it is theoretically possible for embeddings to occupy only a few dimensions while extending significantly along those axes to facilitate semantic disambiguation. However, in our experiments we apply L2 regularization, which encourages a compact embedding space and discourages extreme variance along any single dimension. As a result, we hypothesize that the contrastive objective - by pushing unrelated samples apart - promotes a more balanced use of the available dimensions, thereby reducing anisotropy even in Euclidean settings.

To empirically test this hypothesis, we embedded all samples from the SciDocs MAG dataset, applied mean-centering, and calculated the proportion of variance explained by each principal component. Unlike prior studies in hyperspherical spaces that examine the singular value distribution of the embedding matrix, this approach is more appropriate for Euclidean spaces, where the embedding matrix can be arbitrarily scaled, making raw singular values less interpretable.

The results, shown in Figure 2, compare the base SciDeBERTa model to our SemCSE-trained model. We observe a clear reduction in the dominance of the top principal components in the trained model, resulting in a smoother and more uniform variance distribution across components. This indicates a more isotropic embedding space and supports the conclusion that our training strategy improves the geometric quality of the learned representations.

C SciRepEval Individual Results

	Biomimicry			DRSM			Fields of study			MeSH	SD MAG	SD MeSH
Model	F1	F1 (fs-64)	F1 (fs-16)	F1	F1 (fs-64)	F1 (fs-24)	F1	F1 (fs-10)	F1 (fs-5)	F1	F1	F1
SciBERT	73.37	37.27	16.00	76.84	56.31	46.05	40.02	30.07	21.61	76.71	79.50	79.99
SciDeBERTa	73.42	35.31	13.86	74.41	58.57	49.08	41.39	25.87	17.59	72.24	72.74	76.26
SPECTER	72.87	39.61	19.49	77.34	61.07	48.88	42.43	32.98	26.12	85.47	79.75	87.80
SciNCL	69.74	40.15	21.26	74.73	61.24	49.68	44.14	32.76	25.00	86.17	81.11	89.11
SPECTER2 base	74.21	39.20	14.49	76.42	55.68	43.31	42.21	25.56	15.68	86.76	81.03	89.00
SPECTER2 proximity	72.26	36.14	11.02	76.20	55.79	43.24	42.07	24.70	14.68	86.44	81.36	88.77
jina-v2	69.98	0.63	0.00	75.46	47.05	36.52	**47.14**	24.68	11.08	86.18	82.96	88.53
jina-v3	71.96	17.07	0.64	77.15	55.49	41.62	45.19	24.74	10.86	87.89	82.48	88.85
RoBERTa SimCSE	67.98	40.88	16.85	76.29	**66.67**	**57.60**	46.01	**34.48**	**26.30**	82.60	80.46	84.04
NvEmbed-V2	**77.90**	6.05	0.23	76.86	49.21	37.40	46.04	17.37	4.12	**89.47**	**84.68**	**90.60**
SemCSE (Ours)	77.21	**42.58**	**21.47**	**78.00**	64.72	54.55	43.31	33.60	25.14	86.34	82.68	88.34

Table 4: Results for Classification tasks on the SciRepEval benchmark. The best scores are bold, while second-best are underlined.

	Citation Count	Max hIndex	Peer Review	Publication Year	Tweet Mentions
Model	Kendall's τ	Kendall's τ	Kendall's τ	Kendall's τ	Kendall's τ
SciBERT	39.59	17.19	**23.37**	30.87	25.67
SciDeBERTa	38.83	17.40	21.29	32.80	24.69
SPECTER	35.38	15.51	18.12	30.12	27.73
SciNCL	34.71	15.00	20.03	30.02	26.34
SPECTER2 base	38.42	15.73	20.84	35.57	28.20
SPECTER2 proximity	38.58	14.56	20.22	33.65	27.22
jina-v2	34.65	13.67	16.50	27.41	26.59
jina-v3	34.46	15.28	17.43	30.39	26.65
RoBERTa SimCSE	36.37	11.59	14.89	27.30	24.62
NvEmbed-V2	**39.95**	**18.44**	21.19	**41.72**	**28.38**
SemCSE (Ours)	38.90	17.14	22.41	32.04	27.41

Table 5: Results for Regression tasks on the SciRepEval benchmark. The best scores are bold, while second-best are underlined.

	H. Influence	Paper-Reviewer Matching				RELISH	S2AND	Same Author	SD Cite		SD CoCite		SD CoRead		SD CoView	
Model	MAP	P@10 h	P@5 h	P@10 s	P@5 s	nDCG	B3 F1	MAP	MAP	nDCG	MAP	nDCG	MAP	nDCG	MAP	nDCG
SciBERT	33.72	24.30	26.92	54.58	60.93	82.81	93.03	79.48	53.20	73.79	57.71	77.36	55.74	75.35	59.80	78.10
SciDeBERTa	31.85	24.21	26.73	53.46	60.00	81.90	92.13	75.28	45.94	69.13	50.01	72.24	49.27	71.11	53.18	73.96
SPECTER	42.89	25.51	33.27	**56.17**	65.79	90.07	93.12	86.53	92.25	96.71	88.16	94.81	85.35	92.88	83.58	91.51
SciNCL	43.39	25.42	34.21	55.42	66.54	90.67	**94.63**	87.47	**93.55**	**97.35**	91.66	96.44	**87.69**	**94.00**	85.28	92.23
SPECTER2 base	44.96	25.42	34.02	55.51	66.73	91.63	93.00	87.00	91.97	96.69	**91.70**	**96.56**	87.17	93.71	**85.52**	**92.50**
SPECTER2 prox.	46.07	25.61	34.21	55.61	66.17	91.86	92.80	**89.43**	92.23	96.84	91.13	96.28	86.85	93.53	85.18	92.26
jina-v2	45.36	25.70	34.39	55.51	**67.66**	90.76	94.15	85.08	87.82	94.82	88.56	95.19	85.25	92.85	83.60	91.52
jina-v3	45.40	25.33	**34.77**	55.23	66.54	91.60	94.03	85.24	87.38	94.61	87.32	94.59	84.73	92.57	83.48	91.40
RoBERTa SimCSE	41.37	25.23	29.91	54.77	63.74	87.61	93.23	80.49	76.48	88.88	79.08	90.28	76.39	88.14	78.70	89.05
NvEmbed-V2	**47.38**	**25.98**	34.58	55.42	67.10	**92.84**	93.18	87.87	87.83	94.83	90.26	95.91	86.71	93.54	85.38	92.38
SemCSE (Ours)	44.35	25.42	32.34	55.79	66.17	90.85	93.23	88.66	87.24	94.39	88.84	95.20	85.39	92.85	84.09	91.74

Table 6: Results for Proximity tasks on the SciRepEval benchmark. The best scores are bold, while second-best are underlined.

Model	NFCorpus nDCG	Search nDCG	TREC-CoVID nDCG
SciBERT	53.34	71.49	79.73
SciDeBERTa	52.32	70.53	80.65
SPECTER	64.90	73.25	86.53
SciNCL	70.85	73.46	87.66
SPECTER2 base	72.03	73.76	89.46
SPECTER2 proximity	70.50	73.45	89.29
jina-v2	76.00	74.45	90.74
jina-v3	75.12	74.80	**91.89**
RoBERTa SimCSE	70.16	72.82	87.93
NvEmbed-V2	**81.47**	**75.18**	91.86
SemCSE (Ours)	72.53	73.32	89.82

Table 7: Results for Ad-hoc Search tasks on the SciRepEval benchmark. The best scores are bold, while second-best are underlined.