The *Do’s* and *Don’ts* of Writing an Abstract

McNair Scholars Program
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An abstract is a self-contained, short, and powerful statement that describes a larger work. It is a mini-version of your paper.

- Condensed version of a longer piece of writing
- Highlights the major points covered
- Concisely describing the content and scope of the work.

**General information:**
- 100-350 words
- Accompanies papers, articles, reports, etc.
- Used for presentation at conferences, symposia
Purpose of an Abstract

Allows a reader to quickly and accurately identify the basic content of your paper. Readers should be able to read your abstract to see if the related research is of interest to them.

- Helps reader decide whether to read the entire article or paper
- Provides reader with a preview of research
- Helps conference committee to group it with similar papers for a panel

When can you write an abstract?

- You can begin to write prior to having a paper. It serves as a proposal for panels or articles.
- You can write the abstract after you’ve written your paper.
What should an abstract tell the reader?

**WHAT** you did

**WHY** you did it

**HOW** you did it

**WHAT** you found

**WHAT** it means
The Geopolitical divide that separates the United States and Mexico has long plagued the region with violence and conflict. [...] One form of subalternity, corridos, has functioned to create an alternative discourse to the borderlands imaginary. This study is an examination of the analysis and critique found in corridos that seek a critical approach to the violence at the nations' shared edges and its ensuing political implications. To illustrate their subaltern function, I will examine two incidents: the 1984 McDonalds shooting in San Ysidro, California, and the 1997 death of Ezequiel Hernández in Redford, Texas. These cases are indicative of the politically charged environment of a border region that in becoming an increasingly militarized zone has also set the stage for a cultural battle amongst different forms of knowledge construction and legitimation.
Biological Sciences:
"The Listeria monocytogenes p60 Protein is not Essential for Viability in vitro, but Promotes Virulence in vivo"
Author: Sina Mohammedi

Intracellular pathogens (agents which infect host cells), such as Mycobacterium tuberculosis and Listeria monocytogenes, cause very high mortality rates in the United States. Therefore, deciphering the mechanisms through which the pathogens cause disease is of great interest.[…] My work involves one such secreted protein, called p60. P60 is an antigen (an agent seen by the host immune system) implicated in regulated bacterial cell wall breakdown. The objective of this study was to examine two questions: first, is p60 essential to the viability of Listeria, as previously published? and second, is p60 a virulence factor in Listeria? […] p60 is indeed a key factor in the disease-causing ability of Listeria, but not essential for viability. Future studies will focus on the precise role of p60 in Listeria pathogenesis. This work increases our understanding of such diseases as tuberculoses, various food poisonings, and meningitis.
What abstract requests look like: Humanities

Abstract for a conference panel (Humanities):

Filming the Internet --SCMS Panel, Conference March 10-13]

“Please submit an abstract with 5 item bibliography and CV or author's bio to awcoman@ufl.edu. Submit abstracts by Tuesday, August 8th. All submissions will receive a response on or before Sunday, August 15th.”

Abstract for a Journal article consideration (Humanities):

CFP: The Materials of American Studies

“Please send a 250-word abstract and a brief bio to Sarah Gleeson-White sarah.gleeson-white@sydney.edu.au or Melissa Hardie elissa.hardie@sydney.edu.au by 1 October 2011. Final submissions will be due 1 February 2012. All articles are refereed and should not normally exceed 6,000 words in length. Enquiries welcome.”

Abstract accompanying an article (Humanities):

CFP: The Materials of American Studies

“An abstract (~300 words) may be sent to jaydipsarkarnbu@yahoo.co.in on or before May 15, 2011. Full paper, neatly typed in Times New Roman with 1.5 line spacing, will be of around 3000-4000 words, and must be submitted on or before July 30, 2011. MLA 2007 style sheet preferred. A hard copy of the same should be mailed to Dr. Jaydip Sarkar…”
Abstract for paper at a conference + Journal (Science):

The Society for Engineering in Agriculture 2011

“Authors are invited to submit abstracts (maximum 200 words) for presentation at the 2011 SEAg Conference and for inclusion in the Conference proceedings. Each abstract will be reviewed by the scientific committee before inviting the authors to submit the full article. Conference participants will be invited to submit an updated version of the conference papers as a Journal article to be published in the "Australian Journal of Multi-disciplinary Engineering"

Abstract accompanying an article (Science):

Journal of Environmental Chemistry and Ecotoxicology

“The Abstract should be informative and completely self-explanatory, briefly present the topic, state the scope of the experiments, indicate significant data, and point out major findings and conclusions. The Abstract should be 100 to 200 words in length.. Complete sentences, active verbs, and the third person should be used, and the abstract should be written in the past tense. Standard nomenclature should be used and abbreviations should be avoided. No literature should be cited.”
What abstract requests look like: Social Sciences

Abstract for Conference (Social Science):

The York Deviancy Conference

- All abstracts will be thoroughly peer reviewed and must be in keeping with the conference themes;
- Abstracts must be no more than 300 words in length;
- At least one journal special issue and a book are planned outputs from the meeting, please indicate your willingness to be considered for these on your abstract;

Abstract with an article for a Journal (Social Science):

Journal of World Mathematical Review

- Abstracts should contain a maximum of 250 words and should not contain figures
- All accepted abstracts submitted before the deadline will be published in the Abstract and Programme book
- It is your responsibility to ensure that your abstract is correct. Corrections to abstracts will not always be possible once the abstract deadline has passed.
- Abstract submissions will only be accepted via the meeting website
Parts of the Abstract

Purpose:
Why do we care about the problem? Explain the purpose of your study/paper. Why did you do the research? Ideally in one sentence, state the primary objectives and scope of the study or the reasons why the document was written.

Methods/procedure/approach:
What did you actually do to get your results? (e.g. analyzed 3 novels, completed a series of 5 oil paintings, interviewed 17 students). Clearly state the techniques or approaches used in your study. For papers concerned with non-experimental work (such as those in the humanities, some social sciences, and the fine arts) describe your sources and your use/interpretation of the sources.

Results/findings/product:
Describe your results (the findings of your experimentation), the data collected, and effects observed as informatively and concisely as possible. These results may be experimental or theoretical, just remember to make note of that in your abstract. Give special priority in your abstract to new and verified findings that contradict previous theories. Mention any limits to the accuracy or reliability of your findings.

Conclusion/implications:
What are the larger implications of your findings, especially for the problem/gap identified in step 1? Why are the results of your study important to your field and how do they relate to the purpose of your investigation? Often conclusions are associated with recommendations, suggestions and both rejected and accepted hypotheses.
Strategies for putting one together

Cut and Paste Approach:
- Read your completed draft (if you have one) and highlight the key points of your argument.
- Cut and paste those highlighted portions into a new document
- Synthesize, adding and removing according to the call of abstract criteria.

Research Summary Approach:
- Write a complete, concise account of the work and findings.
- Determine, according to the criteria significant info is missing
- Edit the abstract down through revisions to the specifications of the call.

Component Outline Approach:
- Write the abstract in parts (e.g., purpose, method, findings, etc.)
- Edit with attention to bringing the parts together into one cohesive account of the work
- Add evidence, words to make the abstract flow and read smoothly.
Some Caveats on Writing Abstracts

- Formal diction: no casual or colloquial phrasing
- Avoid jargon if possible
- Do not use contractions (couldn’t, didn’t, etc.)
- Use abbreviations to avoid repetition, but only after you have defined them
- Do not include personal narrative, opinion or commentary
- Try to write in the third person singular
- Use active voice rather than passive voice
- Use complete sentences
Reread, Review and Revise!

- Read the abstract aloud: How does it sound? How does it flow?
- Revise to improve transitions.
- Review the abstract for accuracy; recheck all statistics and numbers.
- Review the abstract for conformity to the directions of the call for abstracts.
In Class Activity

1. Identify the parts of the abstract.

2. Which is compelling and why?

3. Take a moment, and write what would be the first two sentences of your abstract.
   - Write a descriptive topic sentence as an introduction.
   - Write one or two supporting sentences. Consider answering the questions asked with the list of parts to an abstract.