Writing Abstracts for Conference & Journal Submissions

Center for Writing & Rhetoric
Outline

- Definitions
  - What is the goal/purpose of an abstract?

- Examples

- Types
  - Descriptive (indicative) abstracts
  - Informative abstracts
  - Statements of purpose

- Writing Strategies

- Conferences and Journals
Goals & Purposes
Where are you most likely to encounter an abstract?

- Journal databases
- Conference schedules/programs
- As part of a submission packet (conference/journal/etc.)
Abstracts: Goals and Purposes

The goals of an abstract, then, are to:

- Provide a brief summary of the research undertaken
- Describe some larger work
- Outline research procedures or findings
- Outline an argument (claims, types of evidence, analytical frameworks, etc.)
- Identify the context for the argument in the paper
- Anything else?

Note: All abstracts do not have to do all of these things
Examples
Examples → Types

Here is a link to three example abstracts from three different fields:

**Education**

What if... It never ends? Examining challenges in primary teachers' experience during the wholly online teaching

Jim Doran

School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, Queen's University Belfast, UK

**Cultural Studies**

Punk and feminism in Indonesia

Jim Doran

School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, Queen's University Belfast, UK

**Psychology**

You are Right, You are Wrong: The Effect of Feedback on Intuitive Thinking

Isa Guettikhi, Andy Worrall, Dipti Mistry, John Gilhooly, University of Bath, UK

Claremont Graduate University
Common & unique elements from the examples

- What kinds of information (method, argument, research question, context, etc.) do they include?
- What kinds of information are left out?
- Do they focus on procedure or conclusion?
- What is the scope of the different abstracts?
Common & unique elements from the examples

What kind of specialized language is used or omitted?

Who is the intended audience for each?

• General public
• Experts (i.e., people within the field who have topical expertise)
• High-information specialists (i.e., people within the field who have no topical expertise)

Is anything missing from them?
Types
Types

FOCUS/STRUCTURE: Approaches to writing abstracts*

- **Results-Driven** abstract: “concentrates on the **findings** of the research and what might be **concluded** from them”

- **Summary** abstract: “provide one- or two-sentence **synopses** of each section of the paper”

Types

SCOPE/PURPOSE: Different kinds of abstracts*

- **Descriptive/Indicative** abstract: An abstract that “describes *what was done*”

- **Informative** abstract: An abstract that “includes the main findings” of the paper/project

A Typology of Abstracts

Results-driven

"... this paper argues that access to community/familial resources corresponds to a greater likelihood of educational success among middle schoolers..."

Descriptive

"... to discern the relationship between outside (i.e. non-school) factors and educational success, this study utilizes in-person interviews to consider the impact of resources that are asymmetrically distributed middle schoolers..."
Solving Problems: Statements of Purpose

- **Purpose Statement**
  - Establish the intent of the study/research
  - Describes design
    - Relevant theoretical frameworks?
    - Methodology

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  "The purpose of this ____________ [strategy of inquiry, such as ethnography, case study, or other type] study is [was? will be?] to ____________ [understand? explore? develop? discover?] the ____________ [central phenomenon being studied] for ____________ [research site, situational context]. At this stage in the research, the ____________ [central phenomenon being studied] will generally be defined as [provide general definition and justification for that definition if possible]."

Solving Problems: Statements of Purpose

Model

“The purpose of this [strategy of inquiry, such as ethnography, case study, or other type] study is [was? will be?] to [understand? explore? develop? discover?] the [central phenomenon being studied] for [research site, situational context]. At this stage in the research, the [central phenomenon being studied] will generally be defined as [provide general definition and justification for that definition if possible].”

Example

“The article contributes to the literature addressing the needs of gay and bisexual students by identifying several areas where progress can be made in improving the campus climate for them. This paper derives from a two year ethnographic study of a student subculture composed of gay and bisexual males at a large research university; the focus on men reflects the fact that lesbian and bisexual women constitute a separate student subculture at the university under study.”

Writing Strategies for Abstracts
Reverse (& Forward) Outlining

- If you’ve already written something, list the main ideas of each section (or paragraph depending on length).
- Group these main ideas together into more and more concise sentences.
- If you haven’t written anything, sketch out your main thoughts in outline form.
- Use the typical structure of your field and refine your ideas as they progress.
Cut & Paste

**Cut:** select passages from your work that express key ideas

**Paste:** add these together in the logical flow of an abstract and revise

**Sciences:** consider this strategy when the project isn’t neatly expressed by numerical findings

**Humanities:** helpful when a clear thesis and supporting topic sentences can be identified and cut
Conferences & Journal Articles
Specific Abstracts: Conference Papers

When you are adapting a class/seminar paper for submission to a conference, consider the following:

▪ Your abstract should clarify how your paper connects to the theme/focus of the conference
  ● Is your paper topically or thematically connected to the conference?
  ● Will your paper reinforce or challenge dominant ideas at this conference?
  ● Is the conference regional, national, international (i.e., what is the expected level of polish of completed papers/findings)
  ● What is the purpose of the seminar/panel you are proposing for?
Specific Abstracts: Journal Submissions

When you are adapting a class/seminar paper for submission to an academic journal, consider the following:

- Your abstract should clarify how your paper meets the criteria/focus of the journal
  - Is your paper topically or methodologically connected to the journal?
  - What kinds of submissions does the journal accept?
  - What is the scope of the journal?
  - What is the intended audience of the journal?
  - What kinds of resources does the journal offer for submitting authors?
    - Journal of the American Academy of Religion Author Information
    - American Political Science Review Submission Guidelines
References/Resources

University of Manchester Academic Phrasebank,
http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/referring-to-sources/
