ENHANCING WRITING SKILLS

The Abstract
What is an abstract?

An abstract is a concise summary of a research project or paper. *A well written abstract will make the reader want to learn more about your research, read your paper, or attend your presentation.*

Abstracts also serve as a summary of the research so the paper can be categorized and searched by subject and keywords.
How long is an abstract?

Abstracts usually run **between 200 to 300 words**, but you should abide by whatever word limit is stated by the publication, conference, or organization requesting the abstract.
Elements of an Abstract

1) **Purpose or problem**: What is the purpose of your research? Why should we care about it? What theoretical, scientific, artistic, or practical gap is your research filling?

2) **Methodology**: What did you actually do to get your results? Did you analyze 3 novels, interview 200 students, translate a book, invent a new cancer-fighting drug, write an epic poem? Did you approach your subject using a specific theoretical framework, methodology or technical procedure?
Elements of an Abstract

3) **Results or product:** As a result of completing the above procedure or investigation, what did you learn, create, or invent?

4) **Conclusions or implications:** What are the larger implications of your findings, especially for the gap identified in Step 1?
You Decide What to Emphasize

You are not required to follow the order of the four components above.
The emphasis placed on each component will depend on your field or discipline. In some cases, the methods will require more emphasis and explanation, while in other cases, the results and implications will require more explanation and emphasis.
Tips for Writing a Solid Abstract

1. It takes lots of revision to write a good abstract! Expect to spend some time preparing your abstract before submitting it.

2. Find the main point of your paper or research and phrase it in a way that can be understood by an educated non-expert.

3. You may repeat sentences from your paper in your abstract. In some cases, your paper’s introductory paragraphs may be suitable for the abstract, but they will have to be condensed and rewritten to fit the purposes of the abstract.

4. Remember to use keywords important to your field of research or to use words that indicate your field (biochemical engineering, for example, or the history of Byzantine art).
Tips for Writing a Solid Abstract

5. Your abstract should not be so detailed that it requires quotations, citations, or footnotes. Remember, it’s a summary!

6. If you are finding it difficult to summarize your paper or research concisely, write several paragraphs initially then cut and condense it to one paragraph.

7. If you are finding it difficult to meet the word limit, seek the help of an outsider reader (a friend or writing tutor) to help you cut excess words.
Writing for an Academic Audience

You want to demonstrate your passion for your work, but it is equally important that any document you present to an academic audience or committee be clear, structured, and grammatically and mechanically correct. In other words, the writing should be polished and error-free.

The truth: You and your work may not be taken seriously if your writing is not up to par.
The Writing Process

Prewriting
- purpose and audience
- brainstorming
- form

Writing
- organization
- voice
- word choice
- sentence fluency

Responding
- teacher/peer conference
- self/peer evaluation

Revising
- clarifying
- reorganizing
- refining
- using precise language

Editing
- conventions

Proofreading

Publishing/Sharing
- bulletin board
- website
- performance
- author's chair

Responding: faculty advisor/mentor; UWC tutor

Publishing: Submission for conference; academic journal submission
Prewriting: Get A Strategy

• Writing without prewriting is like going grocery shopping without a list.
• Good writing starts with good planning.
• **Prewriting strategies can include**: brainstorming, clustering, freewriting, looping, journalists’ questions, and outlining.
Outlining

When you feel lost in terms of what to write, an outline can give you guidance as to what should come next. Written documents are organized around a central purpose, or thesis. An outline helps you to visualize, and stick to, this purpose. Outlines also help you to identify gaps in your reasoning or research and fix these problems.
A Not-So-Formal Formal Outline

A formal outline is hierarchical and linear. It shows the stages of development of the document and the order in which they will be discussed. It also shows the evidence that you will use to support your ideas. Don’t worry too much about which roman numerals or letters you are using. Just make sure that you are breaking your thesis down into smaller arguments and then developing each argument through examples. Example:

- Introduction
- Major Point 1
  A. Evidence
    1. detail
  B. Evidence
- Major Point 2
  A. Evidence
  B. Evidence
    1. detail
    2. detail
      a. even more detail
        i. even more detail
- Major Point 3, etc.
- Conclusion
Revising

Revision literally means to “see again,” to look at something from a fresh, critical perspective. It is an ongoing process of rethinking the paper: reconsidering your arguments, reviewing your evidence, refining your purpose, reorganizing your presentation, reviving stale prose.
Revise, revise, revise

- Writing is a process of discovery, and you don’t always produce your best stuff when you first get started. So revision is a chance for you to look critically at what you have written to see
- if it’s really worth saying,
- if it says what you wanted to say, and
- if a reader will understand what you’re saying.
The Process of Revising

- Wait awhile after you’ve finished a draft before looking at it again. When you do return to the draft, be honest with yourself. Ask yourself what you really think about the paper.

- Consider the larger issues in the paper, not the punctuation or mechanics.

- Check the focus of the paper: Is it appropriate to the task? Is the topic too big or too narrow? Do you stay on track through the entire paper?

- Think honestly about your thesis: Do you still agree with it? Should it be modified in light of something you discovered as you wrote the paper? Does it make a sophisticated, provocative point, or does it just say what anyone could say if given the same topic? Does your thesis generalize instead of taking a specific position? Should it be changed altogether?

- Think about your purpose in writing: Does your introduction state clearly what you intend to do? Will your aims be clear to your readers?
Editing/Proofreading

Proofreading means examining your text carefully to find and correct typographical errors and mistakes in grammar, style, and spelling.

Before you proofread:

• **Be sure you've revised the larger aspects of your text.** Don't make corrections at the sentence and word level if you still need to work on the focus, organization, and development of the whole document.

• **Set your text aside for a while (15 minutes, a day, a week) between writing and proofing.** Some distance from the text will help you see mistakes more easily.

• **Eliminate unnecessary words before looking for mistakes.**

• **Know what to look for.** From the comments of your professors or a writing center instructor on past papers, make a list of mistakes you need to watch for.
• Work from a printout, not the computer screen.

• Read out loud.

• Use a blank sheet of paper to cover up the lines below the one you're reading.

• If you tend to make many mistakes, check separately for each kind of error, moving from the most to the least important, and following whatever technique works best for you to identify that kind of mistake.

• End with a spelling check, using a computer spelling checker or reading backwards word by word. Remember that spell-check won't catch mistakes with homonyms (e.g., "they're," "their," "there") or certain typos (like "he" for "the").
Resources

Online:

50 Free Resources That Will Improve Your Writing Skills
The 25 Absolute Best Web Resources For Writers
https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/
How To Write An Abstract-Tufts University
Revising Drafts- UNC Writing Center
Proofreading-University of Wisconsin-Madison

Purdue Online Writing Lab

General Format

Summary: APA (American Psychological Association) is most commonly used to cite sources within the social sciences. This resource, revised according to the 6th edition of the APA manual, offers examples for the general format of APA research papers, in-text citations, endnotes/footnotes, and the reference page. For more information, please consult the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition, second printing.

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General APA Guidelines

Your essay should be typed, double-spaced on standard-sized paper (8.5" x 11") with 1" margins...
Acknowlegements/Credits

I want to recognize the following websites, from whence I borrowed information for this presentation:

http://uss.tufts.edu/arc/HOW%20TO%20WRITE%20AN%20ABSTRACT%20for%20Tufts%20Symp.pdf

http://www.writing.ku.edu/prewriting-strategies

http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/revising-drafts/

https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/Proofreading.html

Thank you!