How to Write an Abstract

Undergraduate Research Workshop

Nkenna Onwuzuruoha (Kenna)
PhD Student & Writing Instructor
Department of Writing & Rhetoric Studies
What Is Writing & Rhetoric Studies?
What Is an Abstract?

- A **summary** of a full research paper.
- Provides an overview of the paper’s:
  - Contents
  - Structure
What Is the Function of an Abstract?

- Helps readers decide whether to read the entire paper
- Helps conference reviewers decide whether to accept or decline a proposal
- Allows reviewers to get a sense of the paper they are about to review
Abstracts Are Hard

“Constructing an efficient, clear abstract is a fairly difficult task, even for experienced and widely published writers.”

-Swales & Feak
2009, xiii
Analyzing
Abstracts I

- Read the **two** sample abstracts.
- Look at each sentence and try to answer the question:
  1. “What is this sentence **doing**? What is its **function**?”
  2. What **patterns** do you see in how these abstracts are structured?
Abstract Structure: Rhetorical Moves

Source: Swales and Feak, 2009
Analyzing Abstracts II

- Review the **two new** sample abstracts
- Identify which sentences are accomplishing which rhetorical move:
  - Introducing background/establishing problem
  - Stating the study purpose/gap being filled
  - Stating study methods/materials
  - Reporting results/findings
  - Interpreting results: implications/recommendations
Children undergoing long-term hospital care face problems of isolation from their familiar home and school environments. This isolation has an impact on the emotional wellbeing of the child. In this paper we report on research that explores the design of technologies that mitigate some of the negative aspects of separation, while respecting the sensitivities of the hospital, school and home contexts. We conducted design workshops with parents, teachers and hospital staff and found that there was a strong desire for mediated connection, but also a significant need to protect privacy and avoid disruption. In response we designed a novel technology that combined an ambient presence with photo-sharing to connect hospitalised children with schools and families. This paper reports on the field trial of the technology. The research provides new insights into how technology can support connectedness and provides a foundation for contributing to the wellbeing of children and young people in sensitive settings.
Other Tips for Writing Abstracts

▪ Look for effective models:
  • In your discipline
  • In the specific journal/conference
▪ Make it self-contained.
▪ Keep it concise.
▪ Be accurate.
▪ Get feedback.
Practicing Abstract Writing

1. Consider the research project(s) you are working on this semester
2. Compose a rough draft of an abstract for that study:
   • If you are working on multiple studies, pick one.
   • If you don’t yet have findings, project or imagine what you might find.
Review Your First Draft

1. (Re)read your abstract
2. Write notes in the margins
3. Identify the five rhetorical moves in the abstract.
4. Ask yourself:
   - Does the abstract cover all the rhetorical moves?
   - Is it self-contained?
   - Is it concise?
   - Is it accurate?
Contacts

Dr. Christie Toth
christie.toth@utah.edu
Assistant Professor & Director of
Undergraduate Studies
Department of Writing & Rhetoric Studies
UROP Faculty Mentor

Nkenna Onwuzuruoha
nkenna.onwuzuruoha@utah.edu
PhD Student & Writing Instructor
Department of Writing & Rhetoric Studies