

How to Write an Abstract  
*Undergraduate Research  
Workshop*

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3700

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What Is Writing & Rhetoric  
Studies?

WRITE  
WELL.  
DO  
WELL.

# What Is an Abstract?

- A **summary** of a full research paper.
- Provides an overview of the paper's:
  - Contents
  - Structure

## **Intimate Self-Disclosure via Mobile Messaging: Influence Strategies and Social Responses to Communication Technologies**

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**Abstract.** Social responses to communication technologies theory (SRCT) says that people tend to treat computers as social actors by mindlessly applying social rules. Little work has evaluated this theory in ubiquitous computing. This work tests SRCT for the first time in the context of self-disclosure via messaging on mobile phones. A field experiment (N=71) compared three influence strategies (direct request, flattery, and social norms) with a (ostensibly) human or computer sender. An interaction between strategy and sender was found that challenges predictions of SRCT. This work suggests research questions and methods for future work in mobile persuasive technology.

**Keywords:** mobile phones, persuasive technology, captology, social responses to communication technologies, self-disclosure, flattery, text messaging

# What Is the Function of an Abstract?

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- 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



# Abstracts and the Writing of Abstracts

JOHN M. SWALES  
CHRISTINE B. FEAK



# 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?


Background

Purpose

Methods / Materials

Results / Findings

Discussion / Conclusions /  
Implications / Recommendations



Abstract  
Structure:  
Rhetorical  
Moves

Source: Swales and Feak,  
2009

# Analyzing Abstracts II

Background

Purpose

Methods / Materials

Results / Findings

Discussion / Conclusions /  
Implications / Recommendations

- 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



# Analyzing Abstracts II



Background

Purpose

Methods / Materials

Results / Findings

Discussion / Conclusions /  
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

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- 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.



Background

Purpose

Methods / Materials

Results / Findings

Discussion / Conclusions /  
Implications / Recommendations

# Review Your First Draft

Background

Purpose

Methods / Materials

Results / Findings

Discussion / Conclusions /  
Implications / Recommendations

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

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