Inquiry Symposium 2017

How to Write a Good Abstract:
Dos, Don'ts, and Helpful Hints

(Adapted from materials written by Susan E. Shapiro and Nancy Donaldson, UCSF)

REQUIREMENTS:

Maximum word count: 400
Must include: Introduction/Purpose, Methods/Approach, Results/Product, Discussion/Conclusion
Due date: April 15, 2017, 11:59 pm (PST)

Before You Begin:

Abstracts are required summaries of presentations, posters, publications and research studies. The focus of all abstracts is not the same, but the goal of literally abstracting the structured highlights of the overall presentation, poster, publication or research study is fairly universal. Before you begin writing an abstract take time to obtain, review and understand the structure and function of THIS abstract. Take note of any suggested "subheadings", required font type and size; specific instructions related to length, number of words and any format rules. Once you have mastered the specifications for THIS abstract, be sure to use them. If possible, obtain and review the criteria the editors or reviewers will use in evaluating your abstract and use those, in addition to the required specifications, to guide your work. Avoid the temptation to be innovative. You are more likely to be successful in your abstract submission, publication, or selection if you honor the guidelines and directions provided. With these tools you are ready to go the next step and write that abstract! **Remember, abstracts are expected to be short, pithy summaries—usually limited to one page of print or less.** You can do this!!!!

Structure of the Abstract:

Title:
The title of your abstract must be 50 words or less.

Introduction/Purpose:
No more than 5 sentences of background explaining why this scholarly project is important, what it will add to the science, or the context of your curriculum/project and why it matters. State your purpose in one-two sentences. Begin like this: "The purpose of this (study/curriculum/project) is to…" or "The question guiding this (study/curriculum/project) is…" or, "The aim of this (study/curriculum/project) is…." You get the picture.

Methods/Approach:

If this is a research study, include the design, the setting, the sample, the measurement tools, and the analysis approach. If this is a curricular innovation, include curricular objectives, curricular design, and implementation and evaluation methods/plans. If the abstract is for a project, include the setting, the composition of your team, the participants you worked with, your project intervention, and your evaluation strategy.

Results/Product:
Here you state just the facts. If a research study, include final sample size and composition, simplified demographics, primary results. If a curricular innovation, who and how many participated, what did evaluations show or what were the lessons learned. If a project, what was done and what was the product. This should flow directly from the methods and be consistent with the purpose/aims/questions.

Discussion/Conclusion:
Relate your results directly back to your purpose and research question. This is critical. Did you achieve your purpose, either in your research, curricular innovation or project? If not, why not? How was your question answered? Is the answer what you expected? Why or why not? What were the major limitations of the study or project (every study/project has them, so don't leave this out). Should we adopt this intervention or approach? If more investigation is needed, what are the questions that should be addressed next?

Format Pearls:

Good abstracts are easy to ready, clear and concise. The abstract provides a glimpse of the author's work and attention to detail.

- PROOF READ YOUR WORK!
- Avoid grammatical errors and typos.
- Read your abstract out loud to yourself—how does it sound?
- Ask someone you trust and respect to read it and give you feedback.
- Double check any instructions or guidelines and confirm that your abstract reflects these specifications—recheck your margins, font, type size and word count if appropriate.
- Because your thinking may have evolved as you wrote the abstract take time to be sure the entire abstract evolves from your stated purpose/aim/question.
- Same words as found in the statement of purpose, etc.

Check Yourself:

Did you:
- Follow the instructions!!!!
- Include headings exactly as stated in the instructions/template?
- Use short, clear sentences; one idea per sentence?
- Limit your abstract to the word count/character count requirement?
- Technically edit your work?

You Did It! Submit Your Abstract
Be sure to submit your abstract on or before any relevant deadline and to the correct address. Late or misaddressed abstracts are likely to be returned without review. Be sure to factor in time zones and delays in mail. Even electronic submissions can be complicated by technological glitches. Plan ahead!

Additional Resources:
- Abstract 101 Online Module
- http://career.ucsf.edu/sites/career.ucsf.edu/files/PDF/ResearcherHowtoWriteTitleandAbstract.pdf