# Honours Projects

# Structured Abstracts

## Introduction

An abstract should act as an executive summary for a document. It should summarise the complete document in around 150-300 words and should be capable of being read in isolation from the document itself.

For this reason an abstract should not contain any references or anything that requires referencing such as a quotation. Any abbreviations or acronyms should be explained.

Most people, not just students, find it quite hard to write an abstract and it is often the last part of the document to be written even though it’s the first section to appear on the page.

In order to help with writing an abstract we require you to use a kind of template and to prepare your abstract under a number of headings, each containing only a sentence or two.

We call this a ‘Structured Abstract” and the headings are as follows, specifically for the Honours Project Proposal document:

**Context/Background:** A statement of a current situation or problem that acts as the starting point for the project

**Aim:** What the project is setting out to investigate, possibly this is expressed in the form of a hypothesis

**Method:** A brief description of what will actually be done and perhaps a justification for the chosen method

**Results:** What results are being looked for or expected

**Conclusion:** A few words concluding why the project is worth carrying out.

We will now illustrate the process with an example abstract taken from its traditional style and put into the Structured format

## Original Abstract

Overoptimistic predictions are common in software engineering projects, e.g., the average software project cost overrun is about 30%. This paper examines the use of two popular general tests of optimism (the ASQ and the LOT-R test) to select software engineers that are less likely to provide overoptimistic predictions. A necessary, but not sufficient, condition for this use is that there is a strong relationship between optimism score, as measured by the ASQ and LOT-R tests, and predictions. We report from two experiments on this topic. The experiments suggest that the relation between optimism score as measured by ASQ or LOT-R and predictions is too weak to enable a use of these optimism measurement instruments to select more realistic estimators in software organizations. Our results also suggest that a person's general level of optimism and over-optimistic predictions of performance are, to a large extent, unrelated.

(144 words)

## Structured Version

**Context:** Over-optimistic predictions are common in software engineering projects with an average cost over-run of around 30%. One possible way to reduce this is to recruit people who are less likely to be over-optimistic.

**Aim:** To study how well standard measures of optimism (Attributional Style Questionnaire, ASQ, and the Life Orientation Test- Reduced, LOT-R, tests) correlate with over-optimistic predictions by software engineers

**Method:** Around 25 software engineering undergraduates will be recruited and their degree of optimism measured with the ASQ tool in terms of their attitude to their studies. This will be repeated at different stages of their studies. In a second experiment around 15 senior project managers will be asked to estimate the likely effort required for a software project after their level of optimism has been measured with the LOT-R tool

**Results:** The correlation between level of optimism and actual exam results will be calculated for the first group and the correlation between level of optimism and predicted effort for the second group will be calculated. We are expecting to find a high degree of positive correlation in both cases

**Conclusion:** This project will demonstrate whether the level of optimism exhibited by an individual may be responsible for the significant over-runs on many software projects. If this is the case it may point to selection criteria for staff or perhaps required training.

(224 words – could be better)