Guidelines for Abstracts

Introduction

SWAA requests that paper, panel, and poster abstracts should be 100–250 words. Writing a good abstract is one of the most difficult things for any researcher to do, because it is an entirely different skill from writing the original paper. An abstract must be clear and concise, and it must convey the whole of your paper in just a few words.

As you are writing your abstract, there are several factors to keep in mind:

1. the purpose and audience of the abstract,
2. the basic components of a paper/poster abstract,
3. the elements that make a good abstract, and
4. tips for writing a good abstract.

1. The Purpose and Audience of the Abstract

Your purpose in writing this abstract is to get your paper accepted for presentation at the SWAA conference. The audience you are trying to impress are the members of the conference review committee, who will be reading dozens of abstracts and trying to decide which papers should be presented, and which should be rejected. The wording of the abstract should be very direct. Do not leave your audience guessing at what you mean; tell them. In addition to being clear and brief, your abstract must also be interesting. It must grab your audience and say "look at me." Your abstract is your first, and maybe your only, opportunity to persuade the review committee that your proposal deserves to be presented.

The people who will come to the conference are a secondary audience for your abstract. They will be reading your abstract to decide if your paper/session/poster is worth their time to attend. However, if you do not impress the review committee first, this will be a moot point.

2. The Basic Components of a Paper/Poster Abstract

An abstract must condense your entire paper/poster into just a few short sentences in one or two paragraphs. The four components of an abstract are:

a. **The Introduction**—Start with one or two sentences which clearly expresses the purpose of your study or presentation. What was your research problem and objectives?
b. **Your Methods**—Briefly review the methodology you used to do your research. What did you do, and how did you do it?
c. **Your Findings**—Concisely but adequately summarize your main findings. What did you discover in your research?
d. **Your Conclusions**—Outline what is significant or useful in your research. What do your findings mean?

For each of these components you are walking the fine line between giving enough information to be clear and informative and staying below the word limit for the entire abstract.

3. The Elements that Make a Good Abstract

A good abstract is:

a. **Concise**—Each sentence of your abstract must work toward your purpose of impressing the review committee with the academic merit of your presentation.
b. **Self-contained**—Except for standard abbreviations (e.g. *vs.* for *versus*), define all abbreviations and acronyms. Do not expect the readers to be specialists in all four fields of anthropology. Define any

unique terms or usages.

c. **Accurate**—Clearly present the content and purpose of your paper and only describe information that actually appears in your presentation. If you are doing a study, state whether your research extends or replicates previous investigations.
d. **Non-evaluative**—Do not add personal opinions about the value of your work.
e. **Readable**—The review committee may read dozens of abstracts in a sitting; if your abstract has stilted sentences, misspellings, faulty grammar, poor transitions, or fuzzy logic it will not be viewed favorably.

Take care to edit your abstract before you send it in; remember you are trying to say "Pick me! Pick me!"

4. Tips for Writing a Good Abstract

The following suggestions may help you as your work on writing your abstract:

a. The topic of your presentation should be clearly stated in the first sentence (and no later than the second sentence). It should not be vague, unclear or buried in the middle of the abstract.
b. An abstract is nearly always read along with the title, do not repeat or rephrase your title. In fact, do not ever present the same information twice in your abstract.
c. Use key words from your presentation. Many readers will look for the keywords to quickly understand what a presentation is about. If they do not find the keywords they are looking for in the abstract they may not attend your presentation.
d. Write in clear and dynamic prose. Use the past tense when describing what was done, but where appropriate use active rather than passive verbs.
e. Provide logical connections/transitions between the information in your abstract. Your reader should not have to guess where you stopped presenting your introduction and began your methods section.
f. Use complete short sentences. Do not omit articles or other small words in order to save space.
g. Vary your sentence structure to avoid choppiness. A boring, repetitious abstract suggests that the presentation will be the same.
h. Avoid sentences that contain no real information. If a sentence does not move the reader toward your purpose, leave it out.
i. Use simple words and avoid jargon and acronyms which would take up valuable word space to explain.
j. Unless a number begins a sentence, use digits for numbers.
k. Be concrete, but do not let your abstract be too abstract. Your abstract should be close to the limit, but not over it. If your abstract is much shorter than the word limit, you have probably left something out of it.

Conclusion

Finally, do not just knock out an abstract and send it in. Write a rough draft, edit it for weakness in organization, drop unnecessary information and wordiness, add important information that is missing, strengthen your transitions, read your abstract out loud, and check and double check the grammar, spelling and punctuation. An abstract is not just a bit of busy work that has to be done to get into a conference, but an integral part of your presentation.

Sample Abstracts for a Research Student Conference:

Name: Eulet Davy
Institution: University of Nottingham
Degree Programme: PhD

Researching Education: Different Ways of Knowing and Doing in Educating Black Young People.

Abstract

Much of mainstream schooling in Britain, favours a Euro-centric, White, middle class curriculum, to which sections of the school community may not have access. Young people who do not conform to these norms and values are put at a disadvantage in terms of their academic achievement. Numerous studies have shown that where young people are recognised and valued by school processes and procedures; expectations are high and learning takes place in an environment of mutual respect, this is reflected in their enhanced school performance.

This paper presents the initial findings of an evaluation of alternative ways of knowing and doing in educating Black young people with the focus being on learning which strategies work. Qualitative methods were used, via interviews and focus groups, with a selection of young people enrolled on programmes geared towards raising academic achievement and personal performance: 2 in Nottingham and 1 in Birmingham. Participants were approached via a number of formal and informal contacts built up during the course of my professional career as a teacher both in schools and in voluntary educational organisations. Participants gave their consent to being involved and retained the right to withdraw that consent at any point during the study. Stories were collected from the young people, their parents, teachers and the agencies, which worked with them, on the effects of mainstream schooling and the agencies' programmes on the achievement of these young people. Initial findings demonstrate that young people who were enrolled on these programmes, some of which were run in collaboration with schools, have demonstrated levels of personal development and academic achievement not always demonstrated in school. The methodology will employ Critical Race Theory as its theoretical framework. The study, which forms the basis of this paper, has policy implications for the education of Black young people.

Diane Nutt abstract

Work now - pay later: first generation students' aspirations versus reality

A recent ESF funded research project at the University of Teesside has been examining why 'non-traditional' students leave or stay in HE. The majority of students studying at Teesside are first generation entrants from a variety of groups under-represented in higher education. Almost all of them are from working class backgrounds. According to the research findings, a key factor in students´ aspirations and success is 'paid work'. In the study, many of the respondents identified obtaining a good job as the main reason they came to university. Claims about 'graduate jobs' as better paid and more fulfilling has convinced many young people from low participation neighbourhoods that going to university will give them access to successful and satisfying careers. Ironically however, the research at Teesside also found that the majority of these students were already in paid work alongside full time study. In our survey of over 800 first years, more than half were doing 15-25 hours of paid work alongside their 'full-time' studies. These jobs are low status and low paid, but impact in important ways on the students' learning experiences, their wider university experiences and their subsequent careers. This presentation will consider some of those implications and the tension between aspiration and reality in terms of paid work for working class students.

Improving the Abstract

Quantum Simulations from First Principles

Before

As pointed out by James Langer in a recent editorial of Physics Today, scientific computing is now on a par with laboratory experiment and mathematical theory as a tool for research in science and engineering: "The computer is literally providing a new window through which we can observe the natural world in exquisite detail." [1]. Simulations can substitute for experiments that are impossible or impracticable. They can help interpret experiments, thus providing *virtual laboratories* that complement real laboratories and mathematical theories. Examples will illustrate quantum simulations, that is, simulations at the *microscopic level*, driven by the laws of quantum mechanics. In particular, I will describe recent work on fluids and solids under pressure (predicting structural properties); microfractures in disordered solids; dynamics and stability of nanoparticles; conformation and dynamics of the DNA backbone. These simulations, together with many others appeared in the literature of the last two decades, highlight the important role of *computational quantum mechanics* [2] in addressing problems in condensed matter physics, materials science and chemical physics.

[1] "Computing in Physics: are we taking it too seriously? Or not seriously enough," J. Langer, Physics Today, July 1999.
[2] "Computational material science: the era of applied quantum mechanics," J. Bernholc, Physics Today, September 1999.

After

Scientific computing is now on a par with laboratory experiment and mathematical theory as a tool for research in science and engineering. Simulations can substitute for experiments that are impossible or impracticable. They can help interpret experiments, thus providing *virtual laboratories* that complement real laboratories and mathematical theories.

Examples will illustrate quantum simulations, that is, simulations at the *microscopic level*, driven by the laws of quantum mechanics. In particular, I will describe recent work on (1) fluids and solids under pressure, (2) microfractures in disordered solids, (3) dynamics and stability of nanoparticles, and (4) conformation and dynamics of the DNA backbone. These simulations, together with those in the last two decades, highlight the important role of *computational quantum mechanics* in addressing problems in condensed matter physics, materials science and chemical physics.

New Heavy Fermion Materials

Before

$CeRhIn_5$, $CeIrIn_5$, Ce_2RhIn_8, and Ce_2IrIn_8 are members of a new family of heavy Fermion materials that are tetragonal derivatives of $CeIn_3$. At ambient pressure $CeRhIn_5$ orders antiferromagnetically at T_N=3.8 K out of a state with a Sommerfeld coefficient of order 200 mJ/mol-K^2. With applied pressure, the electrical resistivity develops a peak near 30 K that initially moves to lower temperature with increasing pressure, unlike other Ce-based materials. T_N is nearly pressure independent to 15 kbar, at which point a first-order like transition to a superconducting state with T_c=2.1 K is observed. $CeIrIn_5$ has a Sommerfeld coefficient of order 700 mJ/mol-K_2 and displays bulk superconductivity below 400 mK. The superconducting transition sharpens and moves to higher temperature with applied pressure. Finally, Ce_2RhIn_8 orders antiferromagnetically at 2.8 K, while Ce_2IrIn_8 remains paramagnetic to 100 mK. The variety of these ground states and their evolution with pressure emphasizes the role of spatial dimensionality in determining the ground state of heavy Fermion materials.

~~***Before***~~ Awful

Heavy Fermion materials have "heavy" electrons -- the specific heat coefficient at low temperature is dramatically enhanced from a typical metallic value by factors of 100-1000 -- due to the interaction of conduction electrons with localized magnetic moments. Magnetic and non-magnetic order compete in these materials. When magnetic

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

Expressing and exchanging opinions

To take part effectively in a seminar, you need to be able to say what you think, to find out what other people think, and respond to their ideas. Remember that people are interested in what you have to say. There are many ways to exchange opinions. Look at the examples for five key functions.

Giving your opinion	Asking for opinions	Recognizing an opinion
My view is (that) ...	*Do you agree?*	*OK, I understand (that).*
Agreeing	**Disagreeing**	
I think that's right, (and) ...	*No, I don't really agree.*	

TASK 5 Recognizing language for expressing opinions

1 1.2 **Listen to Extract 2 again and identify the phrases you hear.**

I think (that) ...	What do you think?
What about you?	I see what you mean.
For me, ...	I don't agree with that (at all).
I would say (that) ..	I think that's right, but ...
Yes, absolutely.	I wouldn't say that.
Yes, but what about ...?	I agree (with / that) ..

2 For each phrase in 1, decide which of the five key functions it is used for.

TASK 6 Preparing for a seminar discussion

1 You are going to take part in a seminar discussion. Work in groups and select one of the statements on education to discuss.

1 Students in higher education should be required to learn a foreign language.
2 Having a university education is necessary for a person's success in life.
3 Subjects related to science, technology, engineering, and medicine are more important than humanities subjects such as history and the arts.

2 Work alone and prepare for the discussion. Note down your views on the selected statement using the following headings.

1 Topic and focus
2 Your view
3 Main arguments for
4 Main arguments against
5 Examples and reasons
6 Conclusion

3 Think of some questions to ask other students.

TASK 7 Contributing to a seminar discussion

1 Work in groups and discuss your selected statement. Use the following stages to help you.

1 Express your main points
2 Get reactions
3 Allow others to make their points
4 Listen and respond

2 Select one person to take notes of the main points from your discussion. Use the headings from Task 6.2.

TASK 8 Expanding notes into sentences

1 In Task 4 you listened to part of a discussion about whether education should be a priority for government spending. Look at some notes from the discussion and notice how they can be expanded into sentences. Then answer the questions below.

	Notes	Sentence
1	some courses (e.g. media studies, history) don't help economy - govt should cut	Some university courses, such as media studies and history, don't help the economy and the government should cut these.
2	investment in future; spending cuts = future problems	Education is an investment in the future. If you cut spending on education, you will have problems in the future.

1 Which words are included in both the notes and the sentences?

2 What kind of words have been added to make complete sentences?

2 Expand the notes from your discussion in Task 7 in a similar way.

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Reporting verbs

In an academic context, the present tense is used to report what someone said or wrote, or what they believe. Reporting opinions and ideas usually follows a simple sentence structure.

Subject	Verb	Object
I	*would say*	*(that) university education should be subsidized.*
Some people	*think*	*(that) education should be the main priority.*
The government	*believes*	*that universities should focus on science, technology, engineering, and medicine.*
McKinsky (2012)	*argues*	*that access to education should be universal.*
Shakespeare	*seems to suggest*	*that people are often not in control of their actions.*

There are many other reporting verbs, including: *state, suggest, propose, consider.* Check in your dictionary to see how each verb is used.

TASK 9 Noticing reporting verbs in a summary

1 Read the summary below of the discussion you listened to in Task 4. What tenses are used in the summary?

The discussion focused on education as a priority for government spending. Some of the participants think that education is the most important priority for governments. Other people believe that things like health and transport are equally important. One view is that the government should cut university courses such as media studies and history, because these do not help the economy. The main reasons for not cutting education are that you need education to produce important professionals such as doctors, teachers, and engineers. One participant argues that if the government cut education there would be problems in the future. Overall, there was no final agreement.

2 What verbs are used to report the discussion? Underline any words / phrases in the summary that you could use to write a summary of your own discussion.

TASK 10 Writing a summary of a discussion

1 Use your notes and sentences from Tasks 7 and 8 to write a similar summary of your discussion. Try to include a variety of reporting verbs, any useful phrases you identified, and the appropriate tense.

TASK 11 Reporting back on the discussion

1 Report back on your discussion to the class.

2 Listen carefully to the reports of the other groups and respond.

7D Speaking Seminars (3)

In a seminar, you will sometimes be asked to give a mini-presentation summarizing your reading or research. This may cover one of several ideas or theories related to the seminar topic, which can then be synthesized to show the bigger picture. If you are asked to present a short overview of your reading, it is important to state clearly what you are presenting, the main points or ideas, and any other key information. You may also be asked to summarize what the previous speaker has said, and you may find that you need to ask further questions to build on this, and to extend your and other participants' understanding of the overall topic.

This module covers:

- Summarizing and building on what the speaker says
- Giving a short, informal presentation in a seminar
- Taking part in a seminar discussion

TASK 1 Critical thinking - discussing personality types

1 Look at the following list of characteristics related to personality. Use a dictionary to check the meaning of any unfamiliar words.

active analytical extrovert feeling idealistic introvert intuitive judgmental logical perceptive reactive realistic sensory thinking

2 Categorize the characteristics in any way that makes sense to you. Then compare your categories with other students and give reasons.

3 Select four words from the list that you think most closely describe your own personality. Give reasons and examples.

4 Discuss whether you think it is useful or realistic to categorize people into different personality types.

TASK 2 Listening to short, informal presentations

1 7.3 Listen to Extract 1 from a seminar in which two students present different theoretical approaches to personality which they have researched. As you listen, complete the table with the appropriate information.

	Ben	Katerina
Name of theory	*type approach*	
Main idea		
Key reference(s) (author, date)		
Key words		*conditioning*

2 Compare your answers with a partner. Help your partner to complete any missing information.

3 7.3 Listen again and note down any phrases that Ben and Katerina use to:

- introduce the theory they researched
- introduce the main idea(s)
- refer to any other key information
- signal that they have finished.

INDEPENDENT STUDY

Seminars can be a very productive language learning environment. They give you the opportunity to pick up new phrases from your fellow students as well as from your tutor.

▸ Keep a record of useful phrases you hear in future seminars. Remember to double-check the accuracy at a later date.

TASK 3 Summarizing and building on what the speaker says

1 7.4 Listen to Extract 2, where two students summarize the presentations in Task 2 and build on what the speaker says. Decide whether each summary is (a) accurate, and (b) clear. What additional questions do the students ask?

2 7.4 Listen again and note down the phrases the students use to (a) summarize, and (b) introduce the question.

3 Work in pairs and use your notes from Task 2.1 to practise summarizing the presentations given by Ben and Katerina.

4 7.5 Listen to Extract 3 from the seminar and make notes about the theory of personality presented by Wang.

5 Work in pairs and use your notes to summarize Wang's presentation. Try to think of a question to build on what he says.

TASK 4 Giving a short, informal presentation

1 You are going to prepare some information to present in a seminar, on a subject given to you by your teacher. Make notes using the following headings.

- Subject
- Main idea
- Key reference(s) (author, date)
- Key words

2 Work in groups. Take turns to present the information you have researched, to summarize each other's presentation, and build on what each speaker presents by asking a question. Use the guidelines below to help you.

When you are asked to present, make sure that you:

- introduce the subject you researched
- introduce the main idea
- refer to any other key information
- signal that you have finished.

When you are asked to summarize, make sure that you:

- summarize only the key information
- ask a question to build on what the speaker says.

TASK 5 Preparing for and taking part in a seminar discussion

1 Read the questions about personality. Add any similar questions you can think of.

1 Where does personality come from – is it 'born' or 'made'?
2 Why can siblings (brothers and sisters) often have very different personalities?
3 What are the main influences on personality?
4 To what extent do people's personalities change through their lives?
5 Which personality traits (characteristics) are considered to be (a) highly desirable, and (b) undesirable in your culture?
6 How are your answers to question 5 affected by gender?

2 Prepare your responses to the questions above. Consider the questions from different perspectives, and think of evidence and examples.

3 You are going to take part in a seminar discussion on the topic of how culture influences personality. Read the question and use the guidelines below to help you.

To what extent is an individual's personality influenced by their culture?

- Take turns to put forward your point of view.
- Try to build on what other people say by asking additional questions.
- Evaluate your own participation, in terms of how well you presented your point of view and how you responded to what other people had to say.

11E Vocabulary Phrasal & prepositional verbs

Phrasal and prepositional verbs are important because they occur in both academic and non-academic contexts. Both types of verb consist of a *base verb*, e.g. *look, put, talk*, plus a grammatical word which is sometimes known as a *particle*, e.g. *in, to, up*. Phrasal verbs tend to refer to actions; prepositional verbs can refer to both actions and cognitive activities, e.g. *focus on*. Phrasal verbs are fairly informal in style and more common in speech and non-academic writing; prepositional verbs are not considered informal and are more common in academic writing. Some prepositional verbs are mostly used in the active voice, e.g. *look for*, while others tend to be passive, e.g. *be divided into*. Some have a verb with an equivalent meaning, e.g. *talk about = discuss*. Most phrasal verbs are transitive (i.e. take an object), and the object can come before or after the particle. All prepositional verbs are transitive, and the object normally comes after the preposition, e.g. *look into a problem*. You need to understand and correctly use such verbs in an academic context.

TASK 1 Using prepositional verbs

1 Select the appropriate preposition for the verbs in 1–6 and then match the sentence halves with a–f.

as at for in into on

1 This book is aimed mainly
2 The evidence is based
3 After allowing
4 The population can be divided
5 Overuse of pesticides is likely to result
6 These results may be regarded

a variations in soil fertility, the results demonstrated a clear tendency towards increased growth.
b undergraduate students.
c unreliable on account of the unusual circumstances of the research.
d a case study of a North American family growing up in the Amazon.
e increased resistance to disease.
f two main groups: technophiles and technophobes.

TASK 2 Using phrasal and prepositional verbs

1 Work in pairs and discuss whether sentences 1–5 are likely to be spoken or written. Who do you think the speaker or writer and audience or readers might be in each case?

1 In recent years there have been various attempts at *eradicating* malaria.
2 No need for you to copy this down – I'll *distribute* handouts at the end of my presentation.
3 Now let's *examine* the evidence against the argument.
4 Part of the phenomenon of networking has been the tendency to *maintain* links with extremely large numbers of former colleagues and friends.
5 We *encountered* difficulties when researching environmental effects.
6 The importance of *performing* tasks thoroughly cannot be overstated.

2 Replace the verbs in italics in sentences 1–6 above with phrasal or prepositional verbs of an equivalent meaning.

3 For each sentence, decide which verb is most appropriate for the style and register (spoken or written).

TASK 2 Recognizing how different stages are introduced

1 11.2 **Watch Extract 2 of the lecture and write notes about the following.**

Solution 2 .....

Explanation / Example .....

Evaluation .....

Solution 3 .....

Evaluation .....

2 11.1–11.2 **Watch Extracts 1 and 2 again and match stages 1–9 of the lecture with phrases a–i.**

1 Problem 1 *(e) The first issue on our list is ...*

2 Explanation / example *(i) Let's imagine we have a small company ...*

3 Solution 1 .....

4 Evaluation .....

5 Solution 2 .....

6 Explanation / Example .....

7 Evaluation .....

8 Solution 3 .....

9 Evaluation .....

a This can have ...

b ... but in the long-term ...

c Another possible, and common, solution ...

d But perhaps the most effective measure is ...

e ... the first issue on our list, which is ...

f ... there is the possibility that ...

g Nevertheless, ...

h This approach may involve high costs initially time-wise, which could be spent in the company, but ...

i Let's imagine we have a small company ...

INDEPENDENT STUDY

Indicating different stages in a lecture as you take notes is helpful when you come to review your notes later.

▸ **Think of three note-taking symbols which could be used to represent the stages of problem-solution and evaluation (e.g. P>, S?, =Ev). Use them in your notes in the next lecture you attend which has a problem-solution structure.**

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

Emphasizing (2) Evaluation

When a lecturer is trying to convince an audience of their evaluation of a particular solution, it can be emphasized by using different techniques:

- Making generalizations

  However, if such staff are treated well, ... then they're much less likely to ...

- Using double negatives

  *Nevertheless, there's actually **no** practical reason why this kind of cooperative approach should**n't** be achievable.*

- Reiterating a point

  *In fact, it could turn out to be **a very practical solution**, especially in times of austerity. If there's a downward pressure on costs because of a need for investment in other areas, I would argue that this is **a perfectly feasible solution**.*

- Balancing pros and cons

  *This approach **may** involve high costs initially time-wise, which could be spent in the company, **but** in the long term it **can pay dividends in all senses of the phrase**.*