Overview of session

• Introduction to writing abstracts (20 minutes)
  • Sara Tipton, English Language Institute

• Discipline-specific abstracts: Break-out sessions (60 minutes)
  • David Merolla, Ph.D, Sociology
  • Paul Stemmer, Ph.D, Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
Introduction to Writing Abstracts

• Four functions of abstracts and relation to the reader
• Variety in length and structure of abstracts
• Types of abstracts
• Titles of abstracts
• Keywords
• Suggested activity
• Handout: References and campus resources
Four Functions of Abstracts

1. Screening
   - routing for a proposal or a conference
   - the decision point for your abstract’s fate

2. Summarizing
   - a capsule version, a mini-article

3. Previewing
   - available electronically for referencing
   - basis of keyword searches

4. Indexing
   - organizational ‘road map’
   - immediate overview

(Swales & Feak, 2009)
Variety in Abstracts

1. **Length** varies
   - 150-200 words for traditional abstracts
   - 350 words for dissertations
   - Up to 500 for conference paper proposal; 50 for conference program

2. **Components** vary
   - Subtitles, references, or abbreviations may or may not be allowed

3. **Verb tense** may be past or present
   - Trend toward present tense

*(Swales & Feak, 2004)*
Types of Abstracts

1. **Summary format**
   Set of sentences that each fulfill five rhetorical moves in a conventionalized way; not divided by subheadings

2. **Structured format**
   Built around subheadings for specific areas
   IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results, Analysis and Discussion)

   *(Holt, 2004; Swales & Feak, 2009)*
Summary Format

Each sentence fulfills a role:

1. Start with background, standard practice, real-world phenomenon, or problem statement
2. State the present research and purpose of study
3. Give brief statement of methods/materials/subjects/procedures, without details (What did you do?)
4. Give main results/findings (What did you get?)
5. Give meaningful statement that discusses implications or states why the work is meaningful or significant; leave with strong conclusion (What does it mean?)

(Holt, 2004; Swales & Feak, 2009)
Structured Format

Built around subheadings for specific areas:

• Background/aim/method/results/conclusions
• IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results, Analysis and Discussion)
• This format can be easier to read and is conventional in some disciplines (e.g., sciences)

(adapted from Swales & Feak, 2009)
Titles of Abstracts

• First thing a reader sees
• Often used to route the abstract
• Usually limited by number of words or characters
• Structure and punctuation determined by the conventions in your field
  → A colon (:) may be the norm
  EX “The English Language and the Medical Profession: Instructing and Assessing the Communication Skills of International Physicians”
  → Question, phrase, or complete sentence
  Examples: “How Much Should We Know About Genetics?”
  “Winning Partnerships: K-12 Collaborations in Ohio”

(Swales & Feak, 2009)
Keywords

1. Many research journals will ask for 4-10 *keywords* in addition to your abstract; these are used for efficient indexing, searching, and retrieval of the article.

2. The keywords should be *derived from the abstract text* and also directly *related to the theme of the conference or journal area*, rather than being vague or too general.

3. Some journals require that the keywords be different from words used in the title; such words embedded in the abstract provide an important *path to your article* for researchers who would not find your work on the basis of the title alone.
Suggested Activity

• Assemble 10 or more abstracts from a variety of recent targeted journals in your field of study.

• Find patterns by answering the following questions for each abstract:
  - Is a summary or structured format used?
  - What is the average number of words and sentences?
  - What is the role of each sentence?
  - Are references and abbreviations used?
  - What verb tense is generally used?
  - What is the format and length of the title?
  - Are keywords offered? How many?
References and campus resources

References and online resources – See Handout

Campus resources:

- Writing, Research, and Technology (WRT) Zone - UGL/Adamany Library, 2nd floor
- GPPD seminar series schedule

Note that abstracts for the Graduate and Postdoctoral Research Symposium are due January 30, 2019.
Break-Out Sessions

Discipline-specific abstracts: Break-out sessions (60 minutes)

• David Merolla, Social Sciences
• Paul Stemmer, Health Sciences