Effective abstracts give readers a snapshot of your work and its importance. Ideally, they will aim not only to describe or summarize your work, but to position it within existing research questions in your field and clearly explain the contribution your work stands to make towards addressing these questions. Abstracts usually include: a summary/background of your subject, completed experiments/literature review, methodology, analysis, conclusions/implications of your research and an explanation of why your research matters to the discipline/funding organization.

Effective Abstracts:

- Are usually 150-500 words.
- Explain your work in one or two concise paragraphs.
- Explain the importance of your research in accessible ways.
- State your work’s significance within your field and beyond as well as how it relates to the journal’s interests or the conference’s themes.

Contents of an Abstract

1. Overall Topic and Context of the Research: One to two sentences explaining the topic(s) and placing your research within the larger context of relevant work in your field.
2. Hypothesis/Research Question(s) Addressed: One to two sentences stating what question(s) or issues your research investigates and how your work contributes to existing research.
3. Methods and Materials: One or two sentences describing experiments conducted, literature and/or archives used, interviews or trials completed, primary objects of textual analysis, etc.
4. Results/Findings/Primary Argument: One to three sentences discussing the results of your research and/or your primary, original argument.
5. Conclusion/Expected Impact: One to two sentences explaining the importance of your findings/research.
6. Optional: One to two sentences discussing potential future directions of your research. Based on the results/findings, what areas of research should be further explored?

Writing Tips

- If your work is not yet complete, but you are planning on conducting/finishing the research prior to presenting at the conference, the abstract must still give a summary of the project and anticipated outcome/impact/findings of the research.
- For conference abstracts, explain how your research connects to the conference theme or specific discipline. This is particularly important if you are presenting at a conference outside your primary area of research but still related to your field of study.
- If the paper is already written, try a reverse outline: read through your manuscript and keep the sections above in mind as you select and highlight the elements to incorporate into your abstract.

Final Checklist:

- □ All acronyms explained appropriately.
- □ Abstract is within the word limit guidelines.
- □ Relevance of your research is clearly stated.
- □ Proofread your abstract prior to submission!

Additional Resources

- The OWL at Purdue: Journal Abstracts
- The Professor is In: How to Write a Conference/Journal Abstract
SAMPLE ABSTRACTS

Humanities Conference Abstract:
Science fiction (SF) has a rich history of exploring the boundaries separating “humanity” from “the other,” and contains a deep archive of fictional and theoretical encounters between “the self” and “the radically alien other.” SF carries significant possibilities for understanding these relationships and their implications for the processes and limits of communication and listening. Through brief, comparative readings of three novels—Naomi Mitchison’s Memoirs of a Spacewoman, Stanislaw Lem’s His Master’s Voice, and Susette Elgin’s Native Tongue—I track themes and representations of listening and difference in order to understand the ways that listening as a trope is treated within SF. I argue that these novels treat listening and communication in various complex ways, helping to illuminate a dialectical relationship between subjectivity and otherness as it is constituted through language. These novels suggest that “communication” as a concept must take more seriously the role of listener and the processes of listening. Indeed, it may be that listening is the more indispensable process in communication if we are to legitimately attempt to “come into fellowship with otherness,” an aim frequently at the heart of SF novels.

Humanities Journal Abstract:
Critics have examined both the influence of the medical case model and the newer laboratory sciences on Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes tales, but they have often overlooked key aspects of the stories’ turn-of-the-century historical context. I argue that in response to the indefinite rewards offered by the up-and-coming laboratory sciences and the grandiose claims of many of those practicing these sciences, Doyle chose to return to an earlier clinical method and to echo a type of case narrative that provides both closure and disclosure via the post-mortem exam. In this way, Doyle’s Holmes stories draw attention to the accuracy of knowledge that only such practices can provide. In doing so, Doyle highlights the uncertainty inherent in both many Victorian medical practices and the unproven laboratory sciences of the day—an uncertainty, the tales suggest, that could only be remedied by accruing information through this particularly revealing type of case documentation. In the process, the Holmes tales reflect on the case’s ability to narrate a type of resolution which cannot be otherwise represented. In its emphasis on making comprehensible that which defies mastery lies the case’s essential fit with literary narratives and narratives of detective stories.

Science Conference Abstract:
To date no work has examined the ovipositional responses of female Culex tarsalis to semiochemicals produced by aquatic organisms in different guilds. The relationship between semiochemicals produced by predaceous insects, algivorous fish and predatory/larvivorous fish and their role in oviposition deterrence have only recently begun to be investigated. Previous experiments have shown that female mosquitoes avoid ovipositing in water that contains fish exudates and will instead choose to oviposit in control cups in binary choice trials. In the larval stage, Culex tarsalis can experience a high risk of fish and predatory aquatic insect predation in their natural habitats and females are believed to have evolved behaviors that reduce these risks by avoiding ovipositing in areas where their offspring would be more prone to predation.

Science Journal Abstract:
The construction of multipurpose treatment wetlands for treating municipal wastewater, and providing much needed habitat for riparian and wetland species, has increased over the last few decades. The production of mosquitoes, which can transmit pathogens of humans and companion animals, is a potential drawback to utilizing these treatment wetlands. Local vector control districts are in need of an alternative to stocking the invasive western mosquitofish, Gambusia affinis, for larval mosquito control in sensitive watersheds. We evaluated the efficacy of the arroyo chub, Gila orcutti, as a biological control agent for larval mosquitoes in the Prado Wetlands, Riverside County, CA. Twelve enclosures were installed in the wetland and three stocking treatments used: control, 0 kg/ha (No fish); low stocking density, 1.5 kg/ha (2 fish); and high stocking density, 6 kg/ha (8 fish). Our results indicate that arroyo chubs did not adversely affect the diversity or abundance of macroinvertebrate and microinvertebrate taxa collected in the wetland over the course of the 5-week trial.