Writing an Abstract:
Some navigational tips
For the Undergraduate Research Conference: Creative work, community service learning, independent study, travel abroad, thesis or project work

Annaliese Bischoff
Associate Professor
Department of Landscape Architecture & Regional Planning
Hills North
University of Massachusetts
Amherst MA 01003
abischof@larp.umass.edu
Oral or Poster Presentation: Possible subject matter from

- Creative work: visual or performing arts
- Community service learning: volunteer work
- Independent study: enrichment of a course
- Study abroad: experience and learning
- Thesis or project research: selected topic
What is an abstract?

- The abstract is a brief overview of your selected type of work.
- It is typically a condensed version of a longer piece of writing that highlights the major points covered, while concisely describing the content and scope of the work.
What should an abstract tell the reader?

- WHAT you did,
- WHY you did it,
- HOW you did it,
- WHAT you found, and
- WHAT it means.
One Paragraph: Its Parts

- **Introduction:** The abstract should briefly state the purpose, rationale and scope of the research.
- **Methods:** How the problem was studied?
- **Results:** Present the principal findings.
- **Discussion and conclusion:** What do the findings mean?
Overall Style

• It is important to be **concise**: Say only what is essential, using no more words than necessary to convey the information.

• At the same time it is also important to be **descriptive**; use active verbs.
A list of action verbs

http://www.courses.umass.edu/envd394a/resourse/action.html
Make the abstract easy to read

- Do not use abbreviations without first defining them.
- Don't omit articles or other little words in an effort to save space.
- Avoid jargon.
- Write in the third person singular.
- Use active verbs rather than passive verbs.
- Use short sentences, but vary sentence structure so that the abstract doesn't sound choppy.
- Use complete sentences.
Introduction

- What is this project about?
- Why is this project interesting or important? Elaborate upon the rationale.
- What is the scope of the project?
- What was your hypothesis, what did you think you were going to find?
- Is your topic newly discovered or has it been ignored in the past?
Methods

- What was your approach? Did you use sampling, or experimentation, for example?
- Briefly explain your procedure.
- What sources did you use?
- Are your methods new to your field?
Results

- What did you find when you performed your experiment, your work?
- If your project is not completed yet, what do you think you will find?
- Do you have data collected or effects observed?
- Distinguish between fact and conjecture. If you are theorizing, make sure you state it as such.
Discussion

• Are your results consistent with your initial hypothesis? Why or why not?
Conclusions

- What is *your* interpretation of what these results mean?
- Why should anyone become interested in your findings?
- What are the implications for future research?
The Title

- The title of the abstract should be the same as the title of the paper or project.
- The title should be descriptive.
- The title functions as a “hook:” Make it interesting.
- It should attract and hold the interest of readers.
- Read the titles from past presentations: Which ones would you be interested in attending?
Strategies for a draft

- Use the ‘cut and paste’ method if an existing paper already exists, then revise.
- Use the ‘outline’ method.
- Try the ‘simple’ method.
Simple method to start

1. Write a descriptive topic sentence as an introduction.

2. Write two or three supporting sentences. Consider answering the questions asked with the list of parts to an abstract.

3. Tie everything together with logical order and good transition. For more guidance:

http://www.technical-writing.net/articles/Abstract.html
Simply answer these questions:

- WHAT you did,
- WHY you did it,
- HOW you did it,
- WHAT you found, and
- WHAT it means.
Revise your draft

- Read the abstract aloud: How does it sound? How does it flow?
- Revise to improve transitions.
- Eliminate any unnecessary information.
- Strive for unity, coherence and emphasis.
Follow the guidelines and submit your abstract online by March 2, 2006:

http://www.comcol.umass.edu/conference/registration.aspx