The Art of the Abstract

UWO Classics Graduate Pro-Seminar

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What is an Abstract?

*Abstrahere*: ‘to draw from’.
The abstract is drawn from research already completed.

It’s **not** a proposal (*proponere*), such as you might write for a research grant.
Why would you need to write an abstract?
- If you want to present a conference paper
- If you are applying for funding to present a paper
- If you are submitting an accepted article or book chapter
- For inclusion in a conference program
- For a course assignment
Calls for Papers

For Example:

Society of Classical Studies, World of Classics
List of Calls for Papers

CAC/SCEC Canadian Classical Bulletin
Who will read your abstract?

- Conference Program Committee Members
  - Should they include you on the program?
  - Is it interesting, professional, viable, suited to the audience and the limitations of the conference schedule?

- Conference attendees
  - Should they attend your paper?
  - Do they want to arrange to talk to you about your/their work?

- Researchers
  - Will your paper help them with their research?

- Funding committee members (not necessarily experts)
  - Should they give you money?

- Journal editors
  - Whom should they ask to review your submission?
What does an abstract do?
• Concisely and clearly **summarizes** your argument

• Indicates the **importance** of your work

• **Persuades** readers to want to see / hear more

• **Helps scholars decide** quickly if your work is useful for their research
When should you write your abstract?

- WAY WAY before the due date!
- Show it to your colleagues and ask for their comments.
- Put it away and think it over.
How to write an abstract

- Check the published guidelines regarding word count, format, etc.

- Answer the questions:
  - What is your paper about?
  - How does it respond to the existing scholarly discussion?
  - What are the main steps of your argument?
  - What examples can you use to illustrate your argument?

- Make sure it summarizes a project that is a suitable length for the proposed venue or publication.

- Engage your audience!

- Pay special attention to opening and closing sentences.

- Revise, revise, revise...
Decide on a Title

- This is the first piece of information about your work that readers or an audience will see.
- Who is your audience?
- Search engines privilege titles in determining which results to display. Use key words in your title.
- Your title should clearly indicate what your paper is about. What evidence or problem does your paper address?
- It should differentiate your work from others, if possible.
- It should be attractive, engaging, and memorable.
- It should be brief: ten-twelve words, maximum.
- It should avoid abbreviations and jargon.
- Be judicious with references to current buzzwords, etc.
Examples

- “Vergil’s Aeneid and the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite”
- “The Athenian Empire in the Fourth Century BCE”
- “The Rhetoric of Enmity”
- “The Politics of Enmity in Euripides’ Orestes”
- ““Every Time I Look at You...”: Sappho Thirty-One”
Keywords

- Words that reflect the content of your work
- Words that will help people find your work
- Words that will lead search engines to your work
Where can you find abstracts?
Resources

- SCS Published abstracts
- The Department keeps copies of abstract books in the office.
- *L’année philologique* and other scholarly databases include abstracts of listed works.
- Society for Classical Studies guidelines
  - This presentation draws heavily on their excellent advice.
- Talk to your mentors, professors, supervisors, colleagues.