

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.
- Revise. Revise. Revise.



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.

