GG610
Lecture 3
Abstracts

Make Time

• “I made this so long only because I didn’t have the time to make it shorter.”
  • Blaise Pascal, Lettres provinciales, Dec 4, 1656, Number 16
  • http://www.waywordradio.org/discussion/general-discussion/if-id-had-more-time-id-have-written-a-shorter-letter/

Main Topics

• A Scrutiny of the Abstract II
  K.K. Landes, 1966
• Essential points for an abstract
• Examples of economical writing
• Takeaway points
• References

Distill the essence
Scrutiny of the Abstract II

An Inadequate Abstract
A partial biography of the writer is given. The inadequate abstract is discussed. What should be covered by an abstract is considered. The importance of the abstract is described. Dictionary definitions of "abstract" are quoted. At the conclusion a revised abstract is presented.

Problems
• Does not present any key findings
• No theme
• Excessive passive voice
• Table of contents with verbs
Scrutiny of the Abstract II

• Most important part of the paper (in terms of market reached)
• Leverage

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Abstract readers} & = 10 \rightarrow 500 \\
\text{Paper readers} & = 1 \rightarrow 1
\end{align*}
\]

Scrutiny of the Abstract II

Prepare final abstract
• after a paper is done
or
• after the essential work is done
Abstract: a summary that concentrates the essential information

Scrutiny of the Abstract II

Original
A partial biography of the writer is given. The inadequate abstract is discussed. What should be covered by an abstract is considered. The importance of the abstract is described. Dictionary definitions of "abstract" are quoted. At the conclusion a revised abstract is presented.

Revised
The abstract is of utmost importance, for it is read by 10 to 500 times more people than hear or read the entire article. It should not be a mere recital of the subjects covered. Expressions such as "is discussed" and "is described" should never be included! The abstract should be a condensation and concentration of the essential information in the paper.
### Scrutiny of the Abstract II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revised</th>
<th>Action Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The abstract is of utmost importance, for it is read by 10 to 500 times more people than hear or read the entire article.</td>
<td>• Provide motivation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An abstract is not a table of contents.

- **Revised**
  - The abstract is of utmost importance, for it is read by 10 to 500 times more people than hear or read the entire article. It should not be a mere recital of the subjects covered.
- **Action Item**
  - Provide motivation
  - Set a theme
  - An abstract is not a table of contents.
Scrutiny of the Abstract II

Revised
The abstract is of utmost importance, for it is read by 10 to 500 times more people than hear or read the entire article. It should not be a mere recital of the subjects covered. Expressions such as "is discussed" and "is described" should never be included!

Action Item
- Provide motivation
- Set a theme
  An abstract is not a table of contents.
- Write with punch and be concise

Scrutiny of the Abstract II

Revised
The abstract is of utmost importance, for it is read by 10 to 500 times more people than hear or read the entire article. It should not be a mere recital of the subjects covered. Expressions such as "is discussed" and "is described" should never be included! The abstract should be a condensation and concentration of the essential information in the paper.

Action Item
- Provide motivation
- Set a theme
  An abstract is not a table of contents
- Write with punch and be concise
- Distill the essential findings
Essential Points for an Abstract

1 Motivation/Purpose of work

2 Hypotheses being tested
Essential Points for an Abstract

1 Motivation/Purpose of work
2 Hypotheses being tested
3 Critical aspects of approach

Essential Points for an Abstract

1 Motivation/Purpose of work
2 Hypotheses being tested
3 Critical aspects of approach
4 Critical character of data (if essential)
Essential Points for an Abstract

1 Motivation/Purpose of work
2 Hypotheses being tested
3 Critical aspects of approach
4 Critical character of data (if any)
5 Critical results

6 Critical implications
Examples of Economical Writing

Non-concise

• There are two ways we test the hypothesis.

http://thesestreets.files.wordpress.com/2008/04/farsidetarzan22.gif
Examples of Economical Writing

Non-concise
• There are two ways we test the hypothesis.

Concise
• We test the hypothesis in two ways.

• Savings: 1 word
• What does “there” refer to?

Examples of Economical Writing

Non-concise
• Sometimes the exposures are excellent.
Examples of Economical Writing

Non-concise
• Sometimes the exposures are excellent.

Concise
• Excellent exposures occur locally.

• Use “place word”, not “time word”
• **Savings:** 1 words
Examples of Economical Writing

Non-concise

• For a number of reasons...

Concise

• For five reasons...
  
• “a number of” has absolutely no value
  
• Savings: 2 words

Examples of Economical Writing

Non-concise

• We have a very high degree of confidence in the results.
Examples of Economical Writing

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Non-concise</th>
<th>Concise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• We have a very high degree of confidence in the results.</td>
<td>• The results are robust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoid “very”</td>
<td>• <strong>Savings</strong>: 7 words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of Economical Writing

Non-concise
• The exposures are magnificent and allow us to study the geology in detail.
Examples of Economical Writing

Non-concise
• The exposures are magnificent and allow us to study the geology in detail.

Concise
• The superb exposures permit detailed analysis.
  • Sentence was long
  • **Savings**: 7 words

Examples of Economical Writing

Non-concise
• It is clear that the facts lead to the following conclusion...
Examples of Economical Writing

Non-concise
• It is clear that the facts lead to the following conclusion..

Concise
• It is clear that the facts lead to the following conclusion..
  • Savings: 11 words
  • What does “it” refer to?

Takeaway Points
• Set a theme (and make it good)
• Distill the essence
• Write abstract early and revise
• Extend economical writing to the text!
Useful Online References

- https://www.geology.ucdavis.edu/classes/GELdescriptions/gel190/advice.html
- http://www.ece.cmu.edu/~koopman/essays/abstract.html
- http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/documents/abstract/
- http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/specific-writing-assignments/abstracts