### **Guidelines for writing your abstract**

### **Be Concise**

With a word limit, write only what is necessary, avoiding wordiness. Use active voice and pay attention to excessive prepositional phrasing.

### **Be Clear**

Plan your abstract carefully before writing it. A good abstract will address the following questions: What is the question or problem? Contextualize your topic. What is your thesis/argument? It should be original. What is your evidence? State forthrightly that you are using primary source material. How does your paper fit into the call of the conference? What's going on in the field of study and how does your paper contribute to it? Why does it matter? We know the topic is important to you, why should it be important to the abstract selection committee?

You should be as specific as possible, avoiding overly broad or overreaching statements and claims. And that’s it: don’t get sidetracked by writing too much narrative or over explaining. Say what you need to say and nothing more.

Keep your audience in mind. How much background you give on a topic will depend on the conference. Your pitch should be suited to the specificity of the conference: the more specific the topic, the less broad background you need to give and vice versa.

### **Be Clean**

Revise and edit your abstract to ensure that its final presentation is free of errors. The editing phase is also the best time to see your abstract as a whole and chip away at unnecessary words or phrases. The final draft should be linear and clear and it should read smoothly. If you are tripping over something while reading, the abstract selection committee will as well. Ask another student to read your abstract to ensure its clarity.

Your language should be professional and your style should adhere to academic standards. Contractions may be appealing because of the word limits, but they should be avoided. If citation guidelines are not specifically given, it is appropriate to use the author’s name and title of work (in either italics or quotation marks) within the text rather than use footnotes or in-text citations.

**Common Pitfalls to Avoid**

**Misusing Questions**

While one question, if really good, may be posed in your abstract, you should avoid writing more than one (maybe two, if really really good). If you do pose a question or two, make sure that you either answer it or address why the question matters to your conference paper – unless you are posing an obvious rhetorical question, you should never just let a question hang there. Too many questions takes up too much space and leaves less room for you to develop your argument, methods, evidence, narrative etc. Often times, posing too many questions leaves the abstract committee wondering if you are going to address one or all in your paper and if you even know the answers to them. Remember, you are not expected to have already written your conference paper, but you are expected to have done enough research that you are prepared to write about a specific topic that you can adequately cover in 15-20 minutes. Prove that you have done so.

**Extraneous Jargon and Over-the-Top Phrasing**

Language that helps you be as specific as possible in presenting your argument is great but don’t get your readers bogged down in jargon. They will be reading a lot of abstracts and will not want to wade through the unnecessary language. Keep it simple.

### **Repetition of Claims**

When students repeat claims, they often don’t realize they are doing so. Sometimes this happens because students are not yet clear on their argument. Think about it some more and then write. Other times, students write carelessly and do not proofread. Make sure each sentence is unique and that it contributes to the flow of your abstract.

### **Writing too Broadly about a Topic**

The abstract committee does not need to be reminded of the grand sweep of your topic in order to contextualize it. Place your topic specifically within the scope of the call for papers.