

How to Write an Abstract (for a presentation or poster)

An abstract is a brief proposal that describes what your presentation intends to offer. The trick, though, is to describe the presentation as though it has already been finished, regardless of how much actual work has been done on it. The ability to write an abstract is not a specific skill for Honors life – it can be applied to your future career, whether you are asked to describe a work project, win a contract, or pitch an entertainment idea to executives. Here are several tips on how to write a quality abstract:

- 1) Use existing abstracts from the discipline (math, science, literature, etc.) and model yours after successful examples. The people whose opinion matters most when viewing your abstract expect a certain format and vocabulary, so it is wise to base yours upon excellent models. You can even have a professor from that field of study review it before submission, to get an outside (but knowledgeable) opinion on it.
- 2) Contextualization is important. Academic work interacts with other work in that field all the time – it's crucial that yours does as well. Quotes from prominent thinkers in that field are always helpful, as are historical, cultural, and theoretical contexts.
- 3) Demonstrate that your work is important on a personal level and as a whole to the field of study. Going back and forth between specifics of the project and its larger implications is the way to achieve this.
- 4) Use all of the writing instruction you have received in your education. Be direct and assertive, confident but not cocky. Use strong verbs that make your point, unless your abstract is for a field where a passive voice is more appropriate. Stay specific, and revise over and over.
- 5) **DON'T PROCRASTINATE.** The more effort and research put into making the abstract good, the stronger it appears to the readers. If you wait too long, your project idea will not have enough time to develop and translate well into the abstract. If you put in a great deal of work in preparation, your abstract will feel effortless (in a good way) yet authoritative.
- 6) Ask for help. It's completely acceptable, and if it helps to make your abstract better, it's entirely worth it. Your professors did the same thing when they were in school, so they understand where you are now.
- 7) Check rules or ask the Honors office about maximum word counts. The National Honors Conference abstracts usually request 250 words or less; regionals, 150 words or less.