

Abstract Guidance

Select an essay question from the list provided, *other than the one you have chosen for your essay*. Base your abstract around your hypothetical answer to this question.

Word count: 300

You should include a select bibliography (2-3 secondary works). This will not be included in your word count.

You can make reference to other scholarship in your abstract, but avoid using quotes if possible.

How to write an abstract:

Use the whole word count. If you've been given 300 words to write an abstract, then get as close to 300 as you can.

With limited space, you can't afford to waste any words. Make your first sentence a clear statement of the topic of your paper. The idea of an abstract is to make your work seem exciting enough for the organisers of a conference to invite you to give a full paper, so your first sentence needs to be attention-grabbing.

It's okay to start with 'In this paper I/This paper shall discuss/argue...' and make that first sentence a summary of the approach or angle you're going to take in your paper – it's a very common way to start an abstract. (Using first person phrasing throughout the abstract is fine, though not obligatory).

E.g. 'This paper will examine the process of obscuration inevitable in any translation, and how this process may be embraced and seen as a unique feature of translation to be celebrated and utilised, rather than as a problem to be solved.'

Equally, many people choose to start their abstracts with a statement that encapsulates a problem or idea that their paper intends to address or explore, and go on to state the exact approach they will take later in the abstract.

E.g.: 'Sympathetic and anthropomorphising portrayals in myth—particularly in epic—of humanoid automata raise questions about the moral and relational position of the artificial in a biological world.'

These are both opening sentences from two different abstracts that were accepted to the conferences they were submitted to.

The main body of your abstract needs to clearly describe:

- The immediate context of the issue you will be talking about. There's a fine balance to hit between explaining too little and using your whole word count just giving context.
- What your paper is bringing to the discussion – is there approach you disagree with? A gap in research that you feel needs to be filled? A new approach that hasn't been explored? Essentially you are explaining why you are writing this paper and why it should be of interest to other people.
- What evidence/source/event do you intend to focus your work around (and why)?
 - E.g.: *The most famous example of katabasis is that of Herakles' retrieval of Cerberus to complete one of his labours. I shall use this as the exemplar on which to base...*

The end of your abstract doesn't have to be an explicit summary of the conclusion you will reach, but it should state what you intend your argument to show, or what purpose it will serve – is this furthering our understanding of x issue/text/event? Illuminating a neglected area of study? Highlighting a connection between x and y?

Throughout, bear in mind that your abstract has to sound interesting: a conference organiser is deciding based on your 300 words whether they are interested in listening to you talk for 20-30 minutes. Your job is to convince them that they really do want to hear your paper.

Give your proposed paper a title. You're trying to hit the mark between interesting and clear. Look at articles on Jstor or in collected volumes to get a sense of the range of titles academics use – many of these will have started as papers delivered at conferences.

Give yourself time to proofread your abstract, to tweak wording, etc. Ideally, get someone else to read it to check if you've managed to give clear enough context for your argument. Redraft as needed, just as you would for an essay.