

Writing an abstract for the Undergraduate Research Symposium (or starting your research study)

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- What is an abstract?** An abstract is a short summary of a research article, a book, a speech, or a summary of a research idea that you hope to undertake.
It is a self-contained piece of writing that can stand on its own.
There are two types of abstracts: a) a summary of an already completed research study
b) a brief proposal of a study we are going to undertake
- Why write abstracts?** We write abstracts to give readers (our lecturers, reviewers, other researchers, supervisors) a clear idea of what our study is about, or is going to be about.
- Contents** of an abstract: All abstracts include a full title (of 5-12 words), a summary of the research, keywords, and all the names of the researchers, with their affiliations. Your abstract should be in a single block paragraph.
- Writing** the abstract: Your abstract should include
 - The main argument of the research / the main thesis
 - Why your research is important, and valuable
 - How you have conducted the research (ie the methodology): What have you analysed? Who are the participants? How many? What method(s) did you use?
 - What your analysis is, or what the results/findings are (or what you're hoping to find out, in general terms)
 - Why / how your findings are significant: how your study contributes to the body of knowledge on the general topic
 - Your abstract can include some background information
 - Your abstract should *not* include long quotes, too many references or lists of references
- Writing the title and keywords:** **Your title** should not be limited to the general topic, but to your specific topic. It can be fairly long, even up to 10-12 words.
If "Early 20th century Sinhala fiction" is your general topic area, this can be your specific topic:
"The depiction of greathouses in early 20th century Sinhala fiction."
This is more specific: "A Marxist analysis of the depiction of greathouses in early 20th century Sinhala fiction" as it indicates your analytical approach/framework. The following is even more specific and detailed as it includes the text you have selected for analysis:
"A Marxist analysis of the depiction of greathouses in early 20th century Sinhala fiction: Martin Wickramasinghe's *Gamperaliya*"
The keywords are identified from your general and specific topic, your methodology, the texts chosen for analysis, the writer, and the theory/theoretical framework you use in your analysis. The key words usually recur in your title and in your abstract.
- Individual research studies or collaborative research? As much of humanities research is subjective, and depends on our own individual responses to data (such as literary and textual analysis), we don't tend to do collaborative research. However, when you're a very new researcher, doing a group research project can be useful, efficient and enjoyable.

Reference:

The Writing Centre, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Available at <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/abstracts/> Accessed 18 September 2018