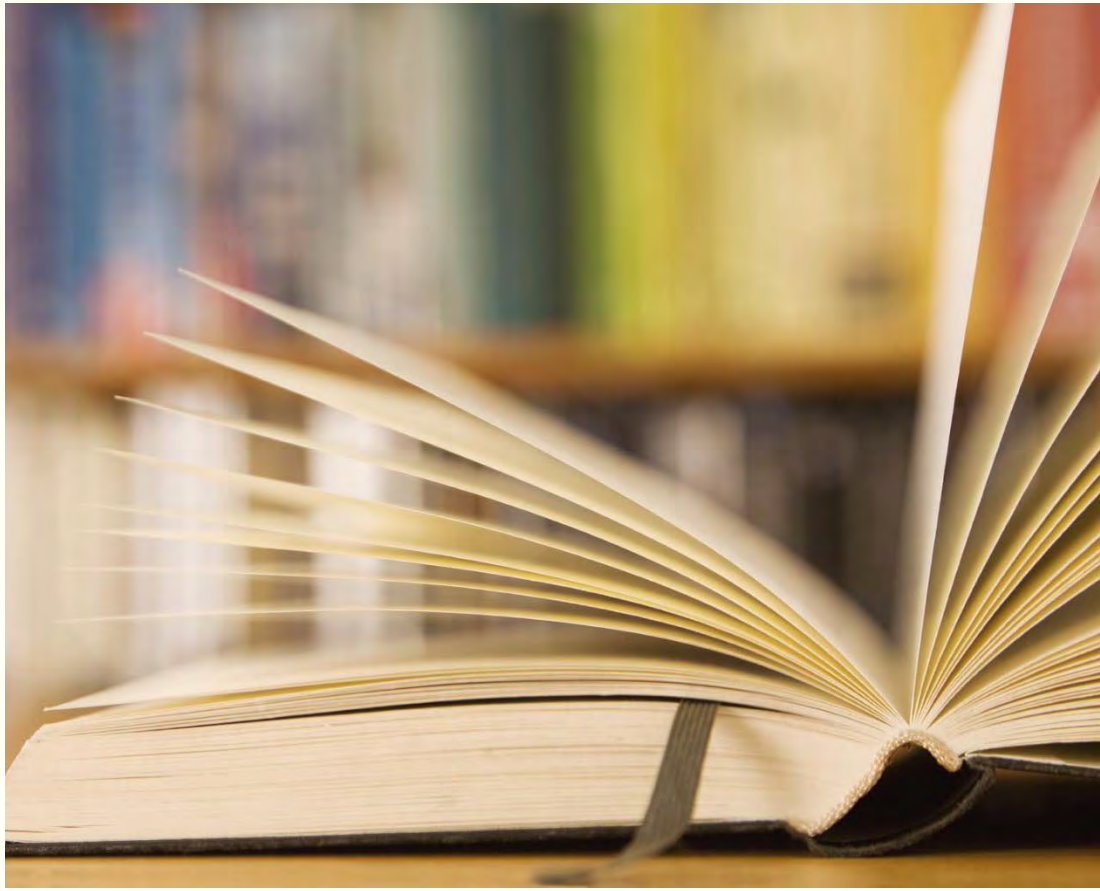
CONCRETE TIPS FOR ABSTRACT WRITING

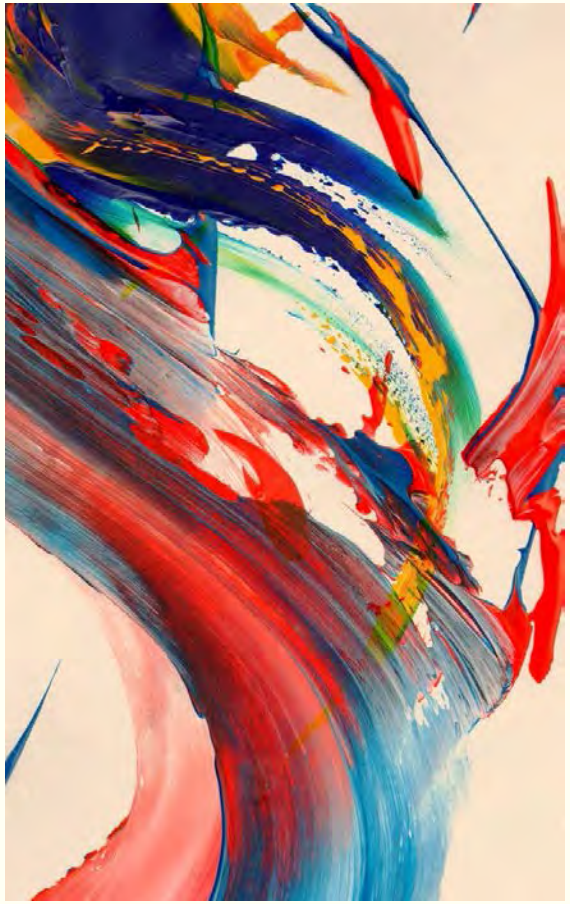
Honors Workshop
October 25, 2017
Prof. Danny Cantrell



Plan for the workshop

- Defining an “abstract”
- Key Elements
- Nuts and Bolts
- Examples
- Assessing Abstracts using a rubric

WHAT IS AN ABSTRACT?

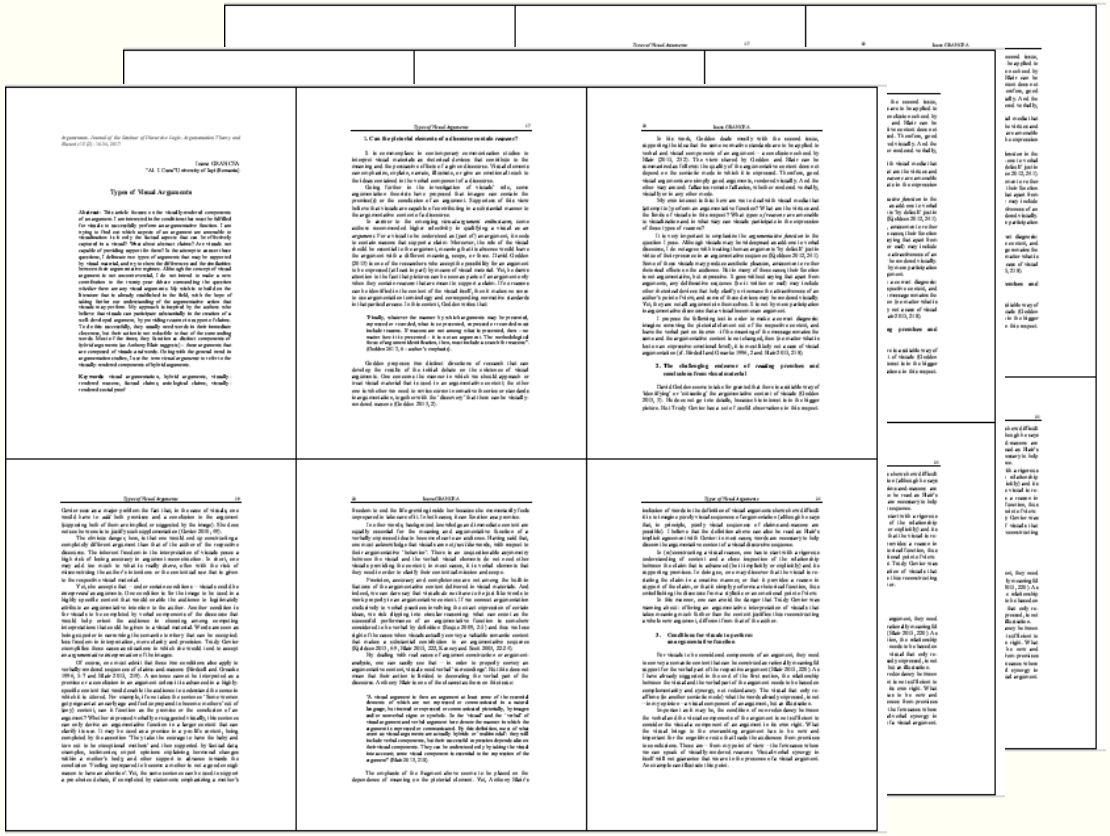


Abstract, defined

- Summary communicating the central ideas of an argument or project
- Widely used in academic and professional life to provide a short preview of a research paper
- Similar to a Movie Trailer

Example

GRANCEA, Ioana. "Types of Visual Arguments." *Argumentum: Journal the Seminar of Discursive Logic, Argumentation Theory & Rhetoric*, vol. 15, no. 2, July 2017, pp. 16-34. EBSCO*host*, libris.mtsac.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=124788573&login.asp&site=ehost-live&scope=



Abstract: This article focuses on the visually-rendered components of an **argument**. I am interested in the conditions that must be fulfilled for **visuals** to successfully perform an argumentative function. I am trying to find out which aspects of an **argument** are amenable to visualization: is it only the factual aspects that can be effectively captured in a **visual**? What about abstract claims? Are **visuals** not capable of providing support for them? In the attempt to answer these questions, I delineate two types of **arguments** that may be supported by **visual** material and try to show the differences and the similarities between their argumentative regimes. Although the concept of **visual argument** is not uncontroversial, I do not intend to make a new contribution to the twenty-year debate surrounding the question whether there are any **visual arguments**. My wish is to build on the literature that is already established in the field, with the hope of taking further our understanding of the argumentative action that **visuals** may perform. My approach is inspired by the authors who believe that **visuals** can participate substantially in the creation of a well-developed **argument**, by providing reasons in support of claims. To do this successfully, they usually need words in their immediate closeness, but their action is not reducible to that of the surrounding words. Most of the times, they function as distinct components of hybrid **arguments** (as Anthony Blair suggests-those **arguments** that are composed of **visuals** and words. Going with the general trend in argumentation studies, I use the term **visual arguments** to refer to the visually-rendered components of hybrid **arguments**. [ABSTRACT FROM AUTHOR]

KEY ELEMENTS

5 Key Elements of an Abstract

1. Motivation
2. Problem statement
3. Approach
4. Results
5. Conclusions

1) Motivation

Why do we care about the problem and the results?

This section should include the **importance of your work**, the difficulty of the area, and the impact it might have if successful.

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"This article focuses on the visually-rendered components of an argument. I am interested in the conditions that must be fulfilled for visuals to successfully perform an argumentative function. I am trying to find out which aspects of an argument are amenable to visualization: is it only the factual aspects that can be effectively captured in a visual? What about abstract claims? Are visuals not capable of providing support for them?"

2) Problem statement

What *problem* are you trying to solve?

What is the *scope* of your work (a generalized approach, or for a specific situation)?

Be careful not to use too much jargon.

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"Although the concept of visual argument is not uncontroversial …. My wish is to build on the literature …with the hope of taking further our understanding of the argumentative action that visuals may perform."

3) Approach:

How did you go about solving or making progress on the problem?

What was the *extent* of your work? Did you look at one or ten examples?

What important *variables* did you control, ignore, or measure?

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4) Results

What's the answer? Most important take away?

If applicable, put any key numbers you found.

Avoid vague, wishy-washy results. That would be in the paper.

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5) Conclusions

What are the implications of your answer?

Are your results *general* or *specific* to a particular case?

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NUTS AND BOLTS

Nuts and Bolts

- Word Count
  - Meet the word count limitation.
  - An abstract word limit of 250 to 400 words is common.

- Be Honest
  - Any major restrictions or limitations on the results should be stated.
  - Include qualifiers like "might", "could", "may", and "seem“ if necessary.

- Works Cited
  - Include any sources referenced in the Abstract, and any major works not referenced

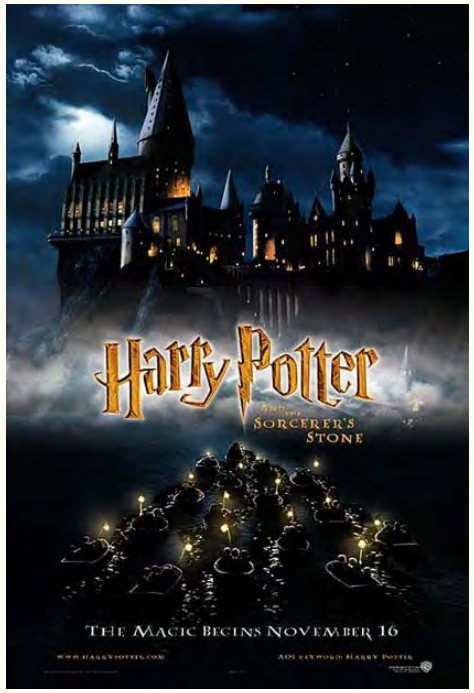
- Revise, Revise, Revise
  - Avoid waiting until the last moment.

- Come see me!

EXAMPLES

Different Parts of the Research Process

- Proposal = Poster
- Abstract = Trailer
- Paper = Movie



Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone - Trailer

25 Word Proposal

Less effective: **Behind the Scenes at the Zoo:** In this presentation, I will talk about what I learned about animal behavior from a recent trip to the Los Angeles Zoo.

More effective: **Behind the Scenes at the Zoo:** While captivity can impede animals' natural behaviors and create behavioral disorders, properly structured zoo environments can effectively stimulate species-appropriate behavior and mitigate animals' stress.

Presenter: Learon Inbar
Mentors: Professors Collette Chattopadhyay and Alannah Rosenburg
Title: The Pursuits and Perks of Poverty: The Development of Egalitarian Ideologies in Medieval Europe Through textiles
Word Count: 249

The use of alternative textile materials and the observance of Church doctrines and dress codes in medieval Western Europe reveal emergent egalitarian ideologies despite restrictions place by the upper class. According to anthropologist Thorsten Veblen's theory of pecuniary emulation, the wealthy obtain power over the poor through the evidence of their wealth. Those with access to silks and dyes, the evidence of wealth in the Middle Ages, had the proof of power.

Through power of possessions, the wealthy of medieval Western Europe demonstrated a seemingly accepted authority over the lower classes. The upper class had dominated the textile trade through the barrier of high cost and also enacted sumptuary laws to retain exclusivity in the market. Despite these devices, the introduction of alternative textiles and cheaper dyes from local ingredients allowed the poor to acquire luxuries similar to the ruling class', therefore diminishing their authority and revealing strains of egalitarianism. For example, using a hue of purple created from madder, an inexpensive plant native to Western Europe (Jacoby 211) allowed them to circumvent sumptuary laws restricting royal Murex purple.

Although some religious houses moved toward ornamentation and luxury, affording nobles the power of emulation, early Christian doctrine and simpler monastic dress codes combated this because of poverty's role in the gospels. In their veneration of poverty as virtue (Tuttle 91), the Franciscan order in particular reversed the Veblenian theory by emulating those without means, instead of those with means, through their voluntary poverty, thus providing growing egalitarianism in the medieval Europe. **(Word Count: 249)**

Works Cited

Jacoby, David. "Silk Economics and Cross Culture Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 197-240. Web 10 Oct. 2011.

Jaster, Margaret Rose. "Clothing Themselves in Acres': Appareland Impoverishment in Medieval and Early Modern England." *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 2 (2005): 91-99. Print.

Schneider, Jane. "Peacocks and Penguins: The Political Economy or European Cloth and Colors." *American Ethnologist* 5.3 (1978): 413-47. 08 Oct. 2011.

Tuttle, Virginia G. "Bosch's Image of Poverty." *The Art Bulletin* 63.1 (1981): 88-95. Web. 30 Nov. 2011.

Effective two-part title; catchy primary title and informative subtitle

Opening sentence provides context and relevance of project

Logical break between paragraphs; second paragraph demonstrates problem to be addressed.

Presents key research concept with citation

Articulates research conclusion and delineates specific solutions

Effective concluding sentence quotes key sources and reiterates

Works Cited:

Not included in the word count. Include the most important sources, even though some may not be cited within the abstract.

ASSESSING ABSTRACTS USING A RUBRIC

You are the reviewer…

- Imagine it is your job to review 100 abstracts submitted for a research conference and you have been asked to grade abstracts on the following scale:
- Working with a partner, assess the sample abstract
- You have 5 minutes….
- You can then share the abstract and the score

Research Conference Abstract Rubric
5=Amazing, 3=OK, 1=Needs Improvement

	5	4	3	2	1
Motivation (Explains why audience should care, sounds interesting)					
Comments:					
Problem Statement (Explains problem, scope of work)					
Comments:					
Approach (Explains how problem was studied, variables explored)					
Comments:					
Results (Shared the answer, if applicable, include numbers)					
Comments:					
Conclusions (Explored implications of research, if applicable generalized)					
Comments:					