

Abstract/synopsis guide for papers in history (or social sciences and humanities, more broadly):

What is an abstract?

The abstract is a short, densely-worded block of text that very quickly communicates to other researchers why they should read the full paper, what it will prove (or what question it will investigate), what methods and sources it will use, and why its findings are important.

Why should I write an abstract?

You can write an abstract before you begin a research project or you can write it after you are through.

Writing an abstract before you begin can actually help you as you carry out the research project, as writing an abstract will force you to establish a clear set of goals that you want the project to accomplish. Abstracts written before the research project is undertaken are usually between 250 and 300 words. **Students wishing to present their historical research at the 2020 Undergraduate Research Symposium are required to submit a 250-300 word abstract for consideration (see the additional guidelines below).**

Writing an abstract after you are finished with the project is also important because it allows other researchers to quickly understand the design, purpose, conclusions, and limitations of your research project. This helps other researchers comprehend how your work relates to other studies that have already been completed in the field, as well as imagine what new investigations might still be needed to understand the problem more completely. Students who successfully present their research at the 2020 Undergraduate Research Symposium will be asked to provide a longer, more complete abstract of 350 words (that includes the project's results or conclusions) after the Symposium, to be included in an online publication of conference proceedings.

Many researchers will write both a “before” abstract and an “after” abstract, and it is very common for authors to discover new ideas or see their work take a different direction (maybe one could not have anticipated) before you are through. So don't be surprised if the final abstract (written after you are finished with the project) is somewhat different from the initial abstract (composed before you began the work). *This is normal and to be expected; after all, research involves the exploration and discovery of new knowledge!*

How do I write an abstract?

An abstract needs to address all of the following points:

- General topic under investigation,
- Specific question(s) being researched,
- Sources of information being used,
- Research methods being used,
- Results of the study (only in the “after” abstract),
- Reason(s) why this project matters to the larger field

An abstract needs to be written in the 3rd person. (So don't say, “I did X,” but instead say, “this project did X.”)

Your name and the title of your project do not need to appear in the abstract, because they will already be listed above it on the page.

An abstract should be clear and convincing. (This means instead of writing “this project might demonstrate Y,” write “this project will demonstrate Y.”)

Feel free to contact Dr. J. Franklin Williamson (fwilliamson@gordonstate.edu) if you have questions about how to apply for the symposium!