How to Write an Abstract

One paragraph of **150-250 words** that concisely and accurately summarizes your work.

Despite the fact that an abstract is quite brief, it must do almost as much work as the multi-page paper that follows it. In most cases it includes the following sections. Each section is typically a single sentence, although there is room for creativity. In particular, the parts may be merged or spread among a set of sentences. Use the following as a checklist for the abstract:

- **Background and Context:**
  This section includes the importance of your work, the difficulty of the area, and the impact it might have if successful. It thus provides the background and the context necessary to understand your study. It answers the perennial question: *Why do we care* about this problem and the results? If your work is incremental progress on a problem that is widely recognized as important, then it is probably better to put the problem statement first to indicate which piece of the larger problem you are working on. If the problem isn't obviously "interesting" or is not well-known in the literature, then it is better to put background and context first.
- **Problem statement:**
  What *problem* are you trying to solve? What *gap* in the literature does your work address? What is the *scope* of your work (do you take a generalized approach, or address a specific situation)? Be careful not to use too much jargon. In some cases it is appropriate to put the problem statement before the background and context, but usually this only works if most readers already understand why the problem is important.
- **Approach / Method / Research Design:**
  How did you go about solving or making progress on the problem? For example did you use a case study, narrative approach, analytic models, depth inquiry, or analysis of field data? Include information about participants, sources of data, selection criteria, processes undertaken, methods of data analysis. What was the *extent* of your work (did you look at one case or many cases cross-culturally)? What important *elements* did you address or consider?
- **Results:**
  What's the answer? Most good depth psychology articles conclude with observations, insights, or theories that illuminate the topic under study. Be specific and be temperate. Avoid vague, hand-waving, grandstanding results; stick closely with your data.
- **Conclusions:**
  What are the implications of your answer? Reach into the theoretical literature to discuss the implications of your work, describe how your study suggests applications in other areas, or describe additional studies that are needed. Is your study going to change the field or the understanding of the topic, add to the research literature, or indicate possible future directions or applications? Are your results *general*, potentially generalizable, or *specific* to your particular case? Avoid grand statements; temper your authorial tone so that your conclusions reflect an appropriate relationship to the theoretical and empirical literature.

The original guidelines on writing an abstract are taken from the website of Philip Koopman of Carnegie Mellon University http://www.ece.cmu.edu/~koopman/essays/abstract.html and adapted to depth psychology inquiry and APA Style by Laurel McCabe of Sonoma State University, for the M.A. in Psychology in Depth Psychology program.