Online Commentary for
Abstracts and
the Writing of Abstracts

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Before we get to the actual commentaries on the tasks, a few preliminary remarks would seem to be in order.

General Comments and Teaching Suggestions

1. Regular users of the textbook (whether teachers, tutors, or independent scholars) may find it more convenient to print out this Commentary.

2. As in our previous volumes in the EAPP series, we are cautious about offering advice to our EAP colleagues, especially as they inevitably have a better understanding of their own teaching contexts than we do. So, all we provide here are a few suggestions of what has worked for us. We divide these comments into those that generally apply and those that relate to some specific task or activity.

3. There is probably more material here than can be worked through in the available time, so be selective in terms of what you focus on. And if you are teaching a group of people who all come from one field, such as medicine or psychology, then you will naturally want to bring in supplementary materials that more closely reflect your participants' interests.

4. It is our experience that most of the tasks are better undertaken by pairs or trios of participants. Discussion will be more lively; participants will feel that they have more to contribute; and additional pieces of information or points of view will probably emerge.

5. Remember the aim throughout is to raise participants' perceptions and sensitivities to the language and structure of texts and to raise their awareness of likely audience reactions to those texts. Try, therefore, to head off arguments and discussions that relate purely to the content of those texts.

6. If you are discussing participants' work in a class or workshop setting, bias for success; that is, focus on achievements rather than failures.

7. For quite a number of the commentaries, we offer the perspective of our research assistant, Vera Irwin, who, at the time of writing, is completing her dissertation in Linguistics. We have adopted this policy in order to better establish a *dialogue* between the tasks and the users of the book. And here it is important to remember that Vera's perspective is that of somebody on the borderland between the Social Sciences and the Humanities. If your research is situated elsewhere, such as on the borderland between Medicine and Engineering, your own perspective will often be different. Hence, we hope an enlightening conversation between the two perspectives will emerge.

8. An online commentary on the University of Michigan Press website is obviously a more flexible document than a printed volume. We welcome your comments and suggestions, which we may be able to incorporate in occasional updates. We can be most easily reached at cfeak@umich.edu or jmswales@umich.edu.

Specific Teaching Suggestions

1. In the text, the first actual abstract-writing activity does not occur until Task Eleven, until about one-third of the way through this short volume. You may want to ask for participant research paper abstracts earlier and perhaps even before the first class or workshop. (We haven't required this in the text itself because it is very hard to predict what might be written.) You might do this to get an early sense of participants' strengths and weaknesses and/or to get an early idea of the research projects that participants are—or have been—engaged in.

2. In free-writing tasks, like Task Eleven, especially with heterogeneous groups drawn from several disciplinary areas, we find that passing out anonymous lists of titles or opening sentences and asking participants to guess who wrote each one is an excellent way of bringing the groups together.

3. For Task Twenty-Five, draw a grid on the board and ask pairs to come up and write in their selections when they have finished. Create some extra columns if members of a pair do not entirely agree.

4. Task Twenty-Eight. If time permits, consider this activity for evaluating a conference abstract. Depending on the size and composition of the class, you can divide the class into two or more review panels set up by an (imaginary) regional multi-disciplinary conference for junior researchers. One panel might consist of engineers reviewing social science CAs, and the other the reverse. Whatever the decisions, make sure that participants will not be reviewing their own CAs!

Appoint review panel chairs, which then ask members to review the abstracts as:

1 = strong/excellent—must be included in the program

2 = fairly good—should get on the program if at all possible

3 = problematic/unconvincing/weak—only include if space needs to be filled

The panel chair will then call a short meeting to tally the rankings and make final decisions. Not more than 50 percent of the abstracts should receive any one of the three ratings.

When the panels reconvene, a representative of each panel should then announce which abstract received the highest rating and why. Congratulations will be in order. Before the class breaks up, each participant should choose an abstract and agree to send an email message to the author giving the panel's rating and explaining why the rating was given. A copy of this should also be sent to the instructor.

This would be a good time to review the rhetoric used in good and bad news email messages.

Research Article Abstracts

Task One

Functions of abstracts

In our view, when we are functioning as "normal academics," Functions 2 and 3 are primary. But if we are working on a literature review, Function 1 can also be important. (And of course when we are doing discourse analysis—as in preparation for this unit!—we also think of abstracts as *mini-texts*.) Function 4 is not relevant. Both John and Chris act as reviewers for journal manuscripts, but we have never used 5. Even so, sometimes we are just sent the abstract of a manuscript submission and asked if we would feel comfortable reviewing the whole article.

Vera Irwin, our research assistant from Linguistics, ranked the functions in this order: 2, 1, 3, 5, 4.

One additional possibility is that abstracts can be used for organizing data to be incorporated into a literature review (see Volume 2). Another possibility in institutions where theses and dissertations are written in the local language is that the accompanying English abstracts can be used to showcase departmental research to the wider world. (John heard about this function when visiting Madrid Polytechnic University in 2007.)

Task Two

Analysis of a political science abstract

1. The key clause is ". . . democracy has little or no effect on infant and child mortality rates" because it summarizes the main finding of the entire article.

2. a. Length seems to be related to the type of field: the "hard" sciences have longer abstracts than the "soft" ones. An average sentence length of around 25 words seems standard—and this is standard for research writing in general.

   b. You might like to do a quick count of one or two abstracts in your collection. A quick survey of 16 articles from applied linguistics produced the average number of sentences as 5.7, with a maximum of 10 and a minimum of 3; in other words, very close to Orasan's findings for Linguistics as a whole.

3. This abstract is written in the present tense. Presenting the opening statement and the beliefs held by other researchers in the present tense makes them appear widespread and current. Presenting the results in the present tense makes them appear current, ongoing, and somewhat less "negotiable."

   According to Vera, it is typical for the field of Linguistics to present theoretical claims and statements in the present tense (to claim universality), but to resort to the past tense when discussing methodology. Results apparently vary between present and past tense.

4. Vera believes that in Linguistics (at least sociolinguistics), citations or references to previous research are not very common in RA abstracts. In Applied Linguistics, it is not uncommon to cite one study, especially if it is a recent one. We suspect that the citation is designed in part to offer an early indication that the ensuing article is up to date.

5. No, this abstract does not use *I* or *we* to refer to the authors. Rather, it uses the less personal *this article* to describe the work done by the researchers. In our experience, this is more typical for a journal article abstract as opposed to a conference abstract, where the use of *I* or *we* is more common. However, considerable disciplinary differences exist.

6. Yes, it is common to use metadiscoursal expressions in the field of linguistics. Examples: *this article, the article, this study, this research, this paper, this contribution, here, the study reported here.*

7. No acronyms/abbreviations are used in this abstract. Across the broad field of linguistics, some acronyms/abbreviations are used but not very many. In general, this is a topic that is under-researched.

8. Move 1: Sentences 1 and 3 (and notice the use of *claim* in Sentence 1)

   Move 2: Sentence 2

   Move 3: Sentence 2 (first part)

   Move 4: Sentence 4

   Move 4: Sentence 5

There are a couple of things to note here. The order of moves is somewhat flexible, and not all the moves may be realized. In this case, there is no obvious Move 5, such as, *This study shows that there is a liberal bias in many political science studies.*

Task Three

An analysis of four abstracts
A terminological note on Abstract 1:

Sentence 3 introduces a number of fancy expressions for types of employees. An *institutionalized star* would be a recognized "high-flyer"; a *lone wolf* "an active person operating largely independently"; a *citizen* is a "team player"; and an *apathetic* is a "person with little interest in or motivation for his or her job."

Here are our analyses:

	Abstract 1	**Abstract 2**	**Abstract 3**	**Abstract 4**
1. Key clause	S③	S③	S⑦	S①
2. Length	Probably	A bit short?	Yes	Rather short
3. Verb tense	The author(s) use present tense through the entire abstract.	Mainly in present tense, with one instance of present perfect in S④.	Authors use present tense for introducing background and when describing the technique used. However, all specifics about methodology and results make use of the past tense.	Present tense describing the study, simple past when talking about biographical or historic information.
4. Citations?	The author(s) refer to a specific model (The Adaptive Response Model), and specific subfield of psychology (IO-Psychology).	No	No	No
5. First person pronoun?	No	Yes (②, ③, ⑥)	No	No
6. Meta-discourse?	Yes (*This article* in Sentence ①)	No	No	Yes (This essay in ①)
7. Acronym use?	Yes (ARM, IO-Psychology)	No	No	No

| 8. Move structure? | M1: -
 M2: ①
 M3: ②
 M4: ③ ④
 M5: ⑤ | M1: ①∞
 M2: ② (end)
 M3: ②
   (beginning)
 M4: ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥
 M5: - | M1: ① ②
 M2: ③
 M3: ③ ④ ⑤
 M4: ⑤ ⑥ ⑦
 M5: ⑦ | M1:
 M2: ①
 M3: ④
 M4: ② ③
 M5: |

Task Four

Opening sentences of abstracts

1. Here are our offerings from the field of Applied Linguistics:

   A. Phenomenon/practice

   It is now common for Francophone researchers to include English language abstracts in their French-language papers.

   B. Purpose

   The purpose of this study is to compare research article abstracts written in English and French.

   C. Researcher action

   A corpus of French and English abstracts from bilingual journals was assembled.

2. As a further sample, we examined the opening sentences from the 16 RA abstracts in the final 2006 issue of *The American Economic Review* and found:

   A. Phenomenon/practice   3 (instances)

   B. Purpose   1

   C. Researcher action   11

   Unclassified: In this case, the opening was the single word *Yes*. The title was "Are technology improvements contradictory?"

   We were quite surprised by these findings, especially by the large proportion of opening *researcher action* statements. In fact, most abstracts opened directly with statements of the form *We analyze . . .* or *We examine. . . .* Further inquiry suggests that purposive statements can be quite rare in a number of fields; apart from economics, we found this to be so in architecture, chemical engineering, and marine biology.

Task Five

Opening sentences and second sentences

1. a. continuing
   b. capturing
   c. new

   We might opt for Version C. because this is the most compact—always a consideration when writing abstracts! Further, *we* is not uncommon in physics abstracts.

2. a. new
   b. capturing
   c. continuing

   We actually disagree on this one. Vera prefers a. and John c. John notes the nice nominalization of *As yet little is known* into *This lack of knowledge.*

3. a. new
   b. continuing
   c. capturing

   A very difficult case; all three have their merits. But notice again the neat nominalization of *more likely to leave school at 16* into *Early school-leaving decisions . . . .*

Task Six

Move 3 in abstracts

Here are some observations.

a. All are probably okay for length.

b. Didar includes information on the impressive sample size, but Sunil and Cengiz do not.

c. Sunil and Cengiz mention the interviews; Didar omits this aspect of the methodology.

d. Didar makes it clearer that the four companies were deliberately chosen because they were different.

e. We like Didar's version, but if there is still space, a short sentence about the interviews would help.

f. Note that Sunil believes that *data* is plural, while Didar and Cengiz believe it to have become uncountable. Studies of academic texts, including those involving concordancing and electronic databases, suggest that most authors (or is it copy editors?) still opt for the plural. In academic speech from Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken Language (MICASE), the choice is about 50–50.

Task Seven

Reducing a methods section

Our answer is as follows:

> 78 workers tested keyboarding in alternating positions (sitting and standing) over 14 weeks. One modified workstation allowed keyboarding in both positions, the other could only be utilized standing. (28 words)

Another version was produced by two participants in one of our classes:

> Over 14 weeks 78 workers tested two modified workstations. The first (ALT1) allowed keying in both sitting and standing positions, while the second (ALT2) allowed only a standing position. (29 words)

Task Eight

Converting noun phrases into *that* clauses

Here are the expected re-writes:

1. Results confirm that year of study and academic discipline influence student information choices.

2. The evidence shows that the word *elderly* is primarily associated with discourses of care and disability.

3. The analysis indicates that the peak pressure of shock waves depends on the deformation speed of the overlays.

4. The findings generally support the idea that structured abstracts can be profitably introduced into research journals.

5. Our investigations indicate that U.S. home construction will probably decline in the future.

6. The numerical results presented demonstrate that the efficiency of the algorithms depends on two points of view: mesh quality and computational effort.

7. Results show that the R-value of transparent composites panels is higher than that of current glazing systems.

8. I argue that a constructivist theory of truth is superior to other theories.

Task Nine

Final sentences of abstracts

A.

1. D: We not think there is much here to make it an E. The only possible evaluative element is the strength of *to demonstrate the effect of.*

2. D: Again, this is marginal. Outside the field it is rather hard to assess "It is also clarified . . . ." It would be different if the authors had written something like "For the first time we have been able to clarify that . . . ."

3. D/E: This seems to be somewhere in the middle: *qualitatively agree* looks rather ordinary; on the other hand the use of *well* does seem promotional.

4. E?: The *correctly estimated* statement is further evaluated positively by the *even when* clause, thus suggesting an important achievement.

Task Ten

Problematizing in abstracts

1. A—direct. Expansion takes place with little knowledge of consequences, which is presumed to be problematic.

2. A—direct. A real-world problem is revealed.

3. B—indirect. It probably implies that under-recognized risk factors exist.

4. B—direct. It implies that there is no agreement on this issue among scholars.

5. A—direct. Lack of knowledge is presumed problematic.

6. B—direct. The impact (either good or bad) is under-studied.

Task Eleven

Drafting an abstract

No commentary possible.

Task Twelve

Editing an abstract

Here is our edited version.

⟨1⟩ The present study investigates the significance of oral health and dental aesthetics among adolescents in a southern Brazilian province. ⟨2⟩ In particular, it analyzes the importance of oral health and practices of oral hygiene among adolescents using qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with participants (MAYBE INSERT THE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS?) from a variety of social groups. ⟨3⟩ The results reveal that for adolescents, dental aesthetics do, in fact, play an important role in areas such as self-image, sexuality, general health or even professional success. ⟨4⟩ The researchers believe that the information yielded by this study can be successfully incorporated into educational materials promoting oral hygiene among adolescents. (98 words)

Task Thirteen

Structured abstracts

1. They could be helpful. While Hartley is probably right to conclude that they increase readability (if only in speed of skimming), they do require that all articles fit the required pattern. Argumentative theoretical papers probably do not fit.

2. We think it is unfortunate that more research hasn't been done on, say, graduate students reading abstracts. The undergrads (especially first year psychology students) are not a valuable subject pool for this task. Senior researchers can probably second-guess or "read between the lines" when reading abstracts in their own area. For them, structured or traditional probably makes little difference.

3. To some extent perhaps. Note that the phrase *structured abstracts* occurs in four of the five sections.

4. It's hard to say. Again, for most empirical studies, the standard headers might work. Maybe it is reasonable for authors to explain to editors why they have not used the standard headings. In a more recent paper, Hartley (2007) shows that a number of authors do not follow the prescribed section headings, or place "wrong" information in a category, as in putting Background comments under the Aim category.

5. Yes, this is a bit of a problem! We might have expected Hartley to have offered a more "factual" and detailed Method section, such as "59 studies of structured abstracts conducted from 1997 through 2005 were analyzed and compared with each other. The main findings of these studies were summarized in a table."

6. Some fields are more practice-oriented, reporting on studies and projects based on a dataset or deriving from experiments, etc. Others (Humanities?) tend to be more theoretical, and thus structured abstracts may not be so suitable.

Task Fourteen

Objective and purpose statements

1. Non-Objective openings: 7, 9, 10.

2. TO + VERB: 1, 3, 4, 6, 8. Advantages: concise and economical. With a heading *Objective* right in front of it, there is no need to repeat something like *the objective of this study was* . . . . On the other hand, useful initial information can be provided by an opening like 12: *The aim of this cohort, prospective study was to* . . .

3. The expected initial *to* is missing.

4. To answer this question, Vera analyzed Objective/Purpose sections of RA abstracts published by Emerald journals in three fields: Engineering, Education, and Management. She looked at 20 abstracts from each field.

Here are Vera's observations. The following verbs were observed twice or more in the three disciplines:

Engineering	Education	Management
to provide (an approach) x 3	*to provide* (insights) x 3	*to provide* (evidence) x 4
to present (the findings) x 3	*to explore* (factors) x 3	*to study* (the effect) x 3
to propose (a method) x 3	*to describe* (a project) x 3	*to analyze* (the degree) x 2
to examine (the subject) x 3	*to discuss* (applications) x 2	*to investigate* (whether) x 2
to discuss (methods) x 2		

It looks like the most popular purposive verb that is accepted in all three disciplines is *to provide* (an approach, insights, evidence), which was used multiple times in all three fields.

We also noticed that the majority of the objectives in Management (13 out of 20) were hedged, as in "This study *seeks* to describe a strategy . . . .", or "This article *aims* to trace the evolution . . . ". Only five of the Education abstracts and only one of the abstracts in Engineering used such hedging in their objectives.

How do these results compare to your observations?

Task Fifteen

An analysis of a structured abstract

1. On the one hand, the article discusses the prescribed ways of handling financial responsibilities within a family, by looking at the didactic literature. On the other, it looks at actual accounting practices in real families.

2. *As reported in this paper* in Sentence 2 of the Design does not seem to be necessary. Maybe this expression was part of a conference abstract (where such a phrase would be more logical) and later got converted into an article abstract.

3. The authors do not specify the types of crises, but we presume they are referring to crises in the society that force families to start paying more attention to their spending habits or personal economic crises within the family.

4. Here are our attempts:

   Research limitations/implications: There remains a question, however, as to what extent these archival data reflect actual spending practices across the society of the time. Despite these limitations, the study provides a valuable insight into household accounting strategies of the time period.

Practical implications: The results of the study can be used as a base for detailed comparison with accounting practices in today's families. Contrasting historic and modern patterns of family accounting would yield valuable information on the evolution of the gender roles over time in Australian society.

Task Sixteen

Converting an unstructured abstract into a structured abstract

Background: Many scholars claim democracy improves the welfare of the poor. However, cross-national studies tend to exclude from their samples non-democratic states that have performed well. This leads to the mistaken inference that non-democracies have worse records than democracies.

Aim: The aim of this study is to challenge this claim by looking at a wide range of cross-cultural data.

Method: Data on child mortality was analyzed, taking into consideration statistics from both democratic and non-democratic states.

Results: We find that overall democracy has little or no effect on infant and child mortality rates.

Conclusions: Our findings contradict the general belief that democratic states have better records of child mortality and education. Although democracies spend more money on education and health than non-democracies, these benefits seem to accrue to middle- and upper-income groups.

No difficulties encountered.

Task Seventeen

Statements in conclusion, discussion, or significance sections

Vera looked at conclusion sections in traditional abstracts from Anthropology and Civil Engineering. Here are the results:

Anthropology

In Anthropology, four out of the ten abstracts did not discuss conclusions or implications. Among the other six that did, only two abstracts introduced their conclusions directly, such as:

> These trends are altering previous territorial arrangements and coming to undermine today's remarkably rich spectrum of human–animal encounters there.

Three other abstracts used various ways to introduce their conclusions, such as:

> *Our findings represent a cautionary tale in showing* the difficulty of assigning individual ancestry . . . .

> *The analysis indicates that* the MRR gives an unbiased estimate for the extra risk of dying . . . .

One of the abstracts was indicative rather than informative; in other words it merely mentioned that the article would offer some conclusions:

> *Finally, formal and informal discursive constraints were explored, and conclusions drawn on the ways that chat room users deal with constraints on their chat activity.*

In all instances where conclusions are discussed in the abstract, the authors use the present tense rather than the past.

Civil Engineering

All ten abstracts we examined had a conclusion section. Unlike Anthropology, preference was given to the direct presentation of the conclusions without any introduction (six out of ten):

> *Further work is recommended on calibrating the model parameters . . . .*

> *Dynamic analysis and wind tunnel tests verify that the wind resistance requirements are easily satisfied.*

The remaining four abstracts introduced their conclusions in various ways:

> *It shows that* Ritz-POD method is more accurate . . . .

> *It is concluded that* MRI could be a valuable tool . . . .

> *Based on the results,* the benefits of the bridge deck management system are illustrated . . .

The overall preference was for the present tense. In one instance (see above), the author used a modal verb *(could be)* to hedge the conclusions.

Abstracts for Short Communications

Task Eighteen

Moves in short communications abstracts

1. ① ②—Background move,③—present research

2. ①—Present research, ②—results, maybe discussion, ③—results/discussion

3. ①—Background move, ②—methods, ③—results/discussion

Note that in Abstract 3, the opening "sentence" does not have a main verb.

Task Nineteen

Writing a short communications abstract

No commentary possible.

Task Twenty

A comparison of different versions of a short communications abstract

Vera's ranking: A, D, C, B.
   Vera's comments:

A: Well balanced between different moves: background, methods, results, and conclusions. The abstract author kept the somewhat humorous tone of the paper. However, the author did not provide the number of subjects studied in the method section and also did not make the direction of the correlation between age and ear size very clear—he/she just mentions that there is a statistically significant correlation.

D: Concise and informative. However, for a short abstract, it is somewhat repetitive, for example, Sentences 1 and 2 ("size of ears and age"). Also, there is no need to point out "5% chance or error" in an abstract because it seems to be standard for a statistical analysis.

B: This abstract seems to be a bit unbalanced, with the very long first sentence mainly devoted to the background move. The second sentence sounds nice though, very economically combining data and results moves. However, the conclusion stating that "the experiment was rewarding" sounds weak.

C: The abstract was somewhat repetitive. The background for the presented research seems to be clearly overstated, and the conclusion/discussion is quite meaningless (asking for the question "so what?").

Task Twenty-One

Editing a short communications abstract

Here is one attempt. Please notice the various changes made.

> At the request of Perinatology Research Branch (PRB) of the U.S. government, we ran a series of seminars aimed at helping post-doctoral fellows in Perinatology to prepare their research for publication. The specialized seminar materials included an electronic corpus of perinatal research articles. All materials and activities were aimed at developing a sense of professional discourse in both international and U.S. participants. This article evaluates the seminar methodology and provides suggestions for further similar programs. (75 words)

Conference Abstracts

Task Twenty-Two

An introduction to conference abstracts

	Mech. Eng.	Nat. Resources	Econ.	Biology	Arch.	Ling.
Q1 Time ahead (in months)	2–12	4	6–12 (major) 2–6 (local)	6	1–6	4–8
Q2 Acceptance %	50–75%	nearly all	depends, but local high	75%	30–50%	varies
Q3 Blind-reviewed	usually no	not blind	depends	I think so	yes	yes
Q4 Max length (words)	150–250	150–250	whole paper; 100–250; 250–500	300	500 or 1 page	250–600
Q5 Research space?	totally true	true	probably true	no	sometimes	largely true
Q6 Help?	research scientist	advisor	advisors; classmates	mentor; advisor; English teacher	tutor	advisor; friends in the field

Task Twenty-Three ▮▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

An analysis of a conference abstract

Part A: Evaluation

1. We agree.

2. We agree; there is no quantitative data of any kind to support the claims in Sentence 7 and Sentence 8.

3. We partly agree. Although we note the supporting citation at the end of Sentence 3, we might have expected at least one reference in support of the first half of Sentence 4.

4. and 5. We could go either way.

Part B: Analysis

1. Move 3—Sentence 6; Move 4—Sentence 7 and Sentence 8; Move 5—missing; Move 6—Sentence 9.

2. We believe so, although collaboratory is described rather than defined.

3. Sentence 4. This sentence sets up the research question the abstract attempts to answer.

4. General (Sentence 7); specific (Sentence 8)

5. *important role/new opportunities*. Sentence 2 *a novel environment*; Sentence 3 *new forms of networks*. As can be seen, they mostly occur at the beginning. It is also clear that the main promotional emphasis is on novelty and innovation. As Sentence 8 suggests, it would also have been possible to further stress the greater equalities of opportunity and access.

6. Sentence 6. No, probably not. *This* is probably needed to tie the two parts of the sentence together.

   Sentence 7. Both alternatives are fine.

   Sentence 8. This is a hard one. We might generally expect *this paper* early on, as in a purpose statement. By the end, we feel that the original Sentence 8 is more likely to be chosen.

7. In our view, this phrase *(The paper closes by . . .)* suggests an author in full command of her research.

8. This is a very interesting comment, but it is probably safer to say that in using *this* the writer is *trying* or *helping* to "bring the reader around to his or her orientation." After all, using *this* or not cannot be the whole story!

Task Twenty-Four

Analyzing conference abstracts in your field

No commentary possible.

Task Twenty-Five

Re-ordering the sections of a conference abstract

The original order of sections was: C, B, F, D, A, G, E. How did you do?

Task Twenty-Six

Qualities of a strong conference abstract

Many regular international conferences offer selection criteria. We give just one here as an illustration from an IEEE conference on Micro Electro Mechanical Systems. We found it at www.mems.2008.org/abstracts/selection/html. The relevant extract contains the following:

> The Technical Program Committee will select abstracts according to how well they address the following questions:

1. What are the significant new accomplishments? State unambiguously whether devices have been fabricated, experimental results obtained, and provide details.

2. What is new in relation to previous work? Provide references to relevant literature (including publications by the author's group).

3. What is the goal or motivation of the work?

4. What is the impact or significance of the results to the MEMS field?

Task Twenty-Seven

An analysis of a promissory conference abstract

1. Clearly some thinking has been given to the topic, but there is little in the abstract to suggest anything substantive has been done. In Sentence 2 *my research will* and in Sentence 6 *I will also investigate* suggest that the author is still in the preparing phase! Also no preliminary results have been given, nor has a method been outlined.

2. At the very least, some details on where the research will be carried out and on what species should be added.

3. We have both written promissory abstracts, but we suspect this is easier to do in our field that it might be in others.

Task Twenty-Eight

Writing your own conference abstract

Naturally, we cannot provide any answers here, but we would anticipate that in sciences such as Biology, the abstracts would be more technical and contain less justification in the openings.

Task Twenty-Nine

An analysis of conference abstract titles and opening sentences

1. The opening sentence seems okay, but the title is not very informative. The use of the colon is a useful common strategy, but what follows is rather enigmatic, even if quite "catchy." How about: *Another Look at Their Relationship?*

2. *Novel target* certainly attracts attention, but the title is a bit vague. What kind of cancer? What kind of target? Given the short title, a longer and more specific opening sentence would be helpful.

3. The title is certainly specific and informative and thus clearly reveals the focus of the presentation. But is the opening sentence saying something rather obvious?

4. The title is fine. Interesting opening sentence beginning with *we*, announcing what has been accomplished in the "pushy" way that engineers seem to prefer!

5. The title here is very broad, and consists of a single noun phrase. Could it be expanded? Also, the connection of the first sentence to the title is unclear.

6. Sophisticated title and pretty good first sentence, which gives an immediate context for the long and complex title.

7. One of those interest-generating titles in the form of a question. The first sentence suggests some familiarity with the field, but *said in her book* needs changing.

8. The title is highly specific, suggesting real expertise on the part of the writer. The first sentence works well to counter the possible "dullness" of the title by raising a general issue. Excellent work here, though do we need both *long* and *for several decades?*

9. Another very specific and informative title, although an editor might suggest *A Focus on* rather than *Focusing on.* The opening statement of fact seems generally fine, but is it in fact *a method?*

10. How do you read that *and* in the middle of the title? Should the two parts be more explicitly linked? And are there too many questions in the over-long opening sentence?

Task Thirty

An analysis of a conference abstract from medicine

1. Sentence 1 opens boldly *There has been an increasing trend . . .* This sets up the relevance of the study. Yes, one would expect to find it very early.

2. This is a bold counter-claim by surgeons (or surgical administrators?). Most of us would expect some increase in risk with increasing sleep deprivation.

3. As it stands, the extra detail in the two middle sections seems appropriate.

4. The definition seems well placed. However, many of our students think it is not very good because it does not take into account how much (or how little) sleep the surgeons actually had before the surgery. Definitions should be used for key concepts in a study when there is no agreed definition or when a term can be variously interpreted. (For instance, *hot* is a relative term; 40 degrees centigrade would indicate hot weather but not a hot oven.)

5. Clearly, the old notion that there should be no negative statements in an abstract is wrong. But note how assertive these authors are with their negative statements.

6. The headings certainly do a lot of the metadiscoursal work. One possible disadvantage is that the intellectual links between the sections may become more implicit. In this case, for example, the rationale for using this particular method is not spelled out.

7. Sentence 9 draws a strong conclusion from the results. Sentence 10 provides the authors' opinions as to their significance.

8. The title is a declarative sentence that clearly states the conclusions of the study. Titles that point to strong conclusions can help sell the abstract.

9. The paper generated a lot of discussion at the conference, most of which questioned the authors' conclusions about work hours. Major criticisms centered on the definition of sleep deprivation, which many perceived as being too narrowly defined. Other criticisms were that the conclusion ran contrary to common sense.

10. Most of the changes seem more cosmetic than anything else, such as *because* in the RAJA as opposed to *due to* in the CA. Note, however, that the acronyms (CABG; STS) in the CA are replaced by full forms. Also there is additional information about perfusion times in the journal article abstract, thus giving useful information about the comparability of the surgeries performed by the two groups of surgeons.

Task Thirty-One

Analyzing different versions of a conference abstract

Abstract/Summary A was written first, followed by C, and then B. There is not a great deal of difference among the three proposed abstracts; however, it's not clear that it is necessary to say anything about the characteristics of the CA. Anyone potentially interested in the teaching or research of CAs will already be familiar with their characteristics. Perhaps a fourth version should be considered.

D. Although the conference abstract has been attracting scholarly attention, the issue of cultural variation in this genre has not been addressed. This paper describes the culture-specific differences of English versus Ukrainian and Russian conference abstracts. It then provides an explanation of the cultural and ideological backgrounds underlying these differences. (50 words)

Task Thirty-Two

Writing a 50-word conference program summary

No answer possible.

PhD Dissertation Abstracts

Task Thirty-Three

An analysis of a dissertation abstract

Well, we are guessing that you got it wrong! We think that you probably chose B as the final version, with C the first one and A the intermediate text. In actual fact, the chronological order is as given: A, B, C. We have lost contact with the student, but we suspect the advisor/committee wanted a more straightforward descriptive opening.

Task Thirty-Four

An analysis of a dissertation abstract from linguistics

1. Yes, we think so. After all, she now has a tenured position in a linguistics department in one of Turkey's best-known universities and also teaches part-time at an American-style business school in Istanbul.

2. All three opening sentences are indeed possible. Her choice is probably the best if only because this was a linguistics/discourse analysis dissertation. We approve of the decisions regarding the use of metadiscourse and tense.

3. Approximations have the advantage of giving a clearer overall picture; they have the disadvantage of giving an impression of vagueness.

4. We think this is just about okay for a 350-word abstract; in the dissertation itself, some further clarifications will of course be necessary.

5. If the methods are described in more detail, this would have the effect of making the abstract less comprehensible to non-linguists. On the other hand, . . .

6. "A summary phrase" is a good choice because it sums up much of the preceding sentence.

7. Because this is a historical claim about cause and effect.

8. This is a major finding. The business communications literature (largely based in the United States) argues that requests are more successful when they are expressed personally and relatively directly.

9. To strengthen the contrast.

10. Yes, or at least the co-chair thinks so!

Task Thirty-Five

An analysis of a dissertation abstract from archaeology

Part A

1. and 2. (VS) We were very surprised by the answers we got. To us, the abstract looked both super-smart and very much a combined effort involving senior professors.

3. (NS) We were not surprised, based on our reading, that the DA was designed to appeal to a wide range of scholars working on the Ancient World. Indeed, a further reason for a wide appeal would likely lie in the fact that it deals with relatively unknown edge of the that world—as indeed the first part of the title suggests.

4. (VS) We were very surprised that this whole approach was Jennifer Gates' idea. Notice the richness of the DA in terms of *novelty*, *range extension*, and *originality*. Consider these elements:

   Para 1.   . . . the *first* archaeologically-based examination . . . *using* unpublished material . . . of this *understudied* region, it offers a *more diverse* conceptualization . . .

   Para 2.   Drawing on *extensive* . . . and *independent* ceramic analysis, this project brings *together* . . . *these new insights* suggest . . .

   Para 3.   Although foregrounding the economic implications, the study also . . . from an *innovative* cultural history perspective

5. (SS). We were somewhat surprised by Jennifer feeling that her title was "deadly dull." We thought it had a catchy pre-colon opening, which was backed up by solid descriptive detail. It also occurred to us that the PhD student in the 21st century was also "traveling the desert edge" as she went along collecting her ancient pots and sherds!

Part B
Highlighting task: See the comments under 4 above.

Task Thirty-Six

Analyzing and drafting a dissertation abstract in your own field

No answer possible.

Choosing Keywords

Task Thirty-Seven ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

Choosing keywords

John chose: cross-national studies; non-democratic states; child mortality

Task Thirty-Eight ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

Choosing keywords for your own abstract

No answers possible.

Appendix

Task Thirty-Nine ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

Writing an abstract in two languages

For this task, we compared abstract versions written in two languages from a variety of fields. We have excluded the medical and science fields because we believe that abstracts in English here are nearly always direct translations of the original. This is not always the case elsewhere. For example, Vera's analysis of German abstracts from sociology showed that the following changes were sometimes made when abstracts were translated into English:

- switching from an inanimate subject *(this study, this data)* to a human subject *(In this study, <u>we</u> . . .)*

- specifying the locality of the study in English translation (e.g., inserting *in Germany*)

- splitting long sentences into two