How to Write an Abstract[1]

Despite the fact that an abstract is quite brief, it does a lot of work! It conveys a lot of information about your project. Each section is typically between one and four sentences depending on the requested length of the abstract. Use the following as a guide for your next abstract:

- **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 of research, and the impact it might have. Similar to the problem statement, abstracts do not always contain a motivation.
- **Problem Statement:**
  What problem are you trying to solve? Maybe there is a knowledge gap you are seeking to fill. Maybe you found a question that needed answering. Maybe someone else's research needed an application. What is the scope of your work (a generalized approach, or for a specific situation)? Be careful not to use too much jargon.
- **Methods:**
  How did you go about solving or making progress on the problem? What texts did you consult? Which experiments did you conduct? What was the extent of your work? What important variables did you control, ignore, or measure?
- **Results:**
  What's the answer? What did you find, discover, or uncover? Put your result(s) here. Avoid vague language.
- **Conclusions:**
  What are the implications of your answer? Is it going to change the world (unlikely), expand an area of inquiry, be a significant "win," or simply serve as a road sign indicating that this path is a waste of time? Are your results general, potentially generalizable, or specific to a particular case?

Other Considerations
An abstract must be a fully self-contained, capsule description of your paper or poster. It can't assume (or attempt to provoke) the reader into flipping through looking for an explanation of what is meant by some vague statement. It must make sense all by itself. Some points to consider include:

- Meet the word count limitation. If your abstract runs too long it may not be accepted. An abstract word limit of 150 to 200 words is common. The UVM Student Research Conference has an abstract word limit of 300.
- Any major restrictions or limitations on the results should be stated, if only by using "weasel-words" such as "might," "could," "may," and "seem."

Conclusion
Writing an efficient abstract is hard work, but worth it!

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[1] Inspired by and adapted from Philip Koopman's guide to abstract writing, available at:
http://www.ece.cmu.edu/~koopman/essays/abstract.html