

Writing Abstracts

An abstract is a capsule version of your thesis, usually written independently of (often after) the thesis. It is not an excerpt of your thesis, nor is it an introduction to your thesis, though it sometimes functions like a pre-introduction. An abstract should be an entirely stand-alone piece of writing that serves to represent your thesis to the wider public: it's the trailer for your full-length feature. A good abstract will invite your reader in for a sneak peek of what they will find if they choose to turn the pages to the longer thesis.

Abstracts also function as a research aid once your thesis is published. Abstracts are extremely important for research, as they give researchers an idea of what your thesis is about without having to skim over the entire article. It is important, therefore, that your abstract contain all of the keywords (nouns and names) that are of central importance to your work: the role of the keywords in an abstract is not unlike the role of tags in a blog. These keywords will be what online databases search when researchers enter search terms.

In general, your abstract should represent, in miniature, all of the important sections of your thesis. The challenge is how to represent such a lot of information in so few words. You are limited to 350 words for the abstract of your MAA thesis. Each thesis will have a different form and each abstract therefore must be composed somewhat differently. But these are some guidelines that will help everyone get started.

- Make a list of the important keywords and phrases in your thesis: these might include materials, disciplines, processes, theories, theorists, artists/designers, themes, subjects, events, etc.
- For each section of your thesis, summarize each main point or topic discussed in a single sentence.
- You can structure your abstract to mimic the structure of your thesis, if that proves to be easiest, or you can reorder the sentences if that makes for a more coherent paragraph (which is all an abstract usually is).

For obvious reasons, then, it is easier to write your abstract after you've finished writing a full draft of your paper. Or at least you need to know what all of the major sections of your thesis will be before you know what you need to include in the abstract. For many writers, the abstract is absolutely the last piece they write before they submit their thesis, but you can begin the abstract much earlier if you feel confident that your thesis will not change dramatically in structure.

One other note: Writing the abstract is often a very time-consuming task. It takes time to whittle a thesis of 9,000 words down to 350. Be sure to leave yourself enough time for this at the end of your long writing journey.

Other questions to consider when writing abstracts (excerpted from the handout "The Abstract" by Dr. Margaret Procter <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/abstract>)

- Why did you do this study or project?
- What did you do, and how?
- What did you find?
- What do your findings mean?
- How well did it work?

EXAMPLES

Water Soluble Colorants On Porcelain Jennifer L. Brant Mentor: Dr. Charles Olson

In the ceramic work of Scandinavian artist, Arne Ase, water-soluble materials such as titanium sulphate, cobalt chloride, tungsten oxide, molybdenum chloride, and selenium chloride are utilized as decorative elements on his porcelain forms. Such chemicals are not of common use in the ceramic arts because of the expense of the raw materials and the possible hazards of working with these chemicals. However, these colorants can create subtle yet breathtaking effects, including hues of black, blue, yellow, or pink, that blend with the surface of the clay, as if the porcelain vessel were a watercolor painting. It is his research, which I have expanded upon and integrated into my own ceramic work. Additional colorants have been tested, including iron sulphate, cobalt sulphate, and copper sulphate. A different firing atmosphere has been incorporated in the research, as well as two porcelain bodies, to expand the palette of colors that can be obtained. The most successful test results have been applied to my porcelain forms, which include a wide variety of functional objects, in order to contribute to my ongoing exploration of personal expression through the medium of clay.

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Cristina Peri Rossi: The Postmodern Transgressions of Parody and Ambiguity

Eduardo Ruiz Mentor: Dr. Lucia Guerra-Cunningham

Uruguayan writer Cristina Peri Rossi's first book, *El libro de mis primos* (The Book of My Cousins, 1969), is compared with her later novel, *La nave de los locos* (The Ship of Fools, 1984), to suggest how an authoritarian society can be criticized through parody and then rebuilt on the foundations of a philosophy of ambiguity, similar to Lyotard's vision of the postmodern. Dissatisfaction with the power structures of tradition and validation of marginality are characteristics of such vision, which inscribe Peri Rossi in the postmodern current of Latin-American literature. The postmodern condition agrees with the major conclusions drawn from both works. First, tradition is viewed as a decadent state of affairs that needs to be brushed aside, for it does not respond to genuine human concerns and, in fact, has frustrated and destroyed them. Parody is the tool used to dispose of tradition. Secondly, there has to be an acceptance of the margins, of the other. This presupposes a tolerant ambiguity of inclusion that is capable of rebuilding instead of destroying, and does so by using the very materials of the other. What *El Libro* destroys *La nave* rebuilds. *El Libro*'s mission is to do away with the atrophied waste of patriarchal order, while *La nave* seeks to fill up the resulting void with one possible solution: the conciliation of opposing forces by a tolerant philosophy of inclusion.

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