

Writing a SCHOLAR Day Abstract

An abstract is a short summary of your research. A good abstract makes the reader want to learn more about your project. Your SCHOLAR Day abstract should be written for a broad, general audience. Technical language, while appropriate, should be defined so that your abstract can be understood by a lay audience. You should write your abstract in consultation with your nominating professor, who is your best resource for how to write a good abstract for your project. Your abstract should answer the following questions.

1. What was your research project's purpose and significance?
2. What methods or approaches did you use?
3. What did you discover (or what do you expect to discover)?
4. What are the implications of your research? If applicable, what future work does your project enable?

Your abstract should address these questions in one or more clearly written paragraphs. Either past or present tense is fine, and first person (using the word "I") is acceptable for some disciplines—consult your nominating professor if you aren't sure. You should include citations as needed, using a style appropriate for your discipline. The length limit for the abstract is 150 words for poster presentations or 250 words for a formal presentation. Your abstract will be evaluated on how well it satisfies the following objectives:

- **Project is clearly defined:** The purpose and significance of the project and the project's realized or anticipated outcomes are clearly articulated. A direction for the future is also provided (if applicable).
- **Methods are clearly described:** Methodological choices and procedures are clearly defined and supported.
- **Abstract is clearly written:** Abstract is clear, concise, interesting, and relevant with no grammatical errors. If needed, citations are used appropriately.
- **Evidence that the presentation will engage a SCHOLAR Day audience:** The topic and approach are described in an interesting, creative, and compelling manner to engage the interest of lay persons and professionals in the field.

When writing or revising your abstract, a good overarching goal is to make sure your abstract passes "The So What Test." That is, does your abstract answer the question "So what?" convincingly enough that any member of the University community, and even the general public, will see your project as something that matters and is interesting?

Here's an example of an effective abstract for a SCHOLAR Day audience:

"Attitudes on Race and Criminal Justice" by Graycen Wood

The American criminal justice system relies on the presumption of innocence of the accused. Consequently, every defendant, regardless of gender, ethnicity, shape, or size, should enter the courtroom with a blank slate. While this may be the ideal standard, human beings carry with them biases which are perpetuated via the use of language. Past research has demonstrated a clear disconnect in the public's level of satisfaction with the criminal justice system. What has not been previously examined is how race plays a role in the public's satisfaction with sentences handed down to

offenders and in the creation of bias that could interrupt the criminal justice process. In my research, respondents were asked to complete a 17-question survey administered online assessing participants' opinions on criminal sentencing, semantic differential ratings, and an implicit association test to identify implicit racial biases. It is hypothesized that results will reveal: people with any implicit preference for white people will rate the images closer to the negative words and will rate the sentences given to the offenders as adequate or lenient; people who identify sentences given to offenders as lenient will be less satisfied with the criminal justice system; and people with an implicit preference for black people will rate the sentences given to the offenders as harsh. Future implications of my research include implementing diversity training in the jury selection process. Limitations include the respondents' prior conception of the criminal justice system, respondents' tendency to answer dishonestly, and technological malfunctions with the implicit association test.

Notice how the abstract answers the 4 questions listed above:

1. What was your research project's purpose and significance? The first three sentences demonstrate that the research is significant because people's biases can compromise the presumption of innocence—a bedrock principle of the American criminal justice system. The next two sentences define the purpose of the author's research, investigating how race impacts the public's perception of criminal sentences.
2. What methods or approaches did you use? The next sentence states that a 17-question online survey was administered.
3. What did you discover (or expect to discover)? The next sentence explains that project's expected results.
4. What were the implications of your research? The final two sentences of the abstract explain the research's implications for jury selection and training (which further reinforces the research's significance) and potential limitations of the research.

Overall, the beginning of the abstract explains the research project's significance in a compelling way so that the project passes "The So What Test." The strong statement of the project's significance motivates the following explanation of the research project's purpose, methods, results, and implications.

See "Abstract Examples from Scholar Day 2019" for other examples of good SCHOLAR Day abstracts from a variety of disciplines.