# Writing an Abstract for the Undergraduate Research Symposium

**What is an abstract?**

An abstract provides a concise description of your work, your approach/methods, and your results. An abstract is quite formulaic; the genre is designed to allow readers to get a quick sense of your work without having to search for information. There is generally a word limit of 150-250. For the purposes of this abstract, you should think of your audience as college-level readers who may not be familiar with your discipline; it will be important to craft an abstract that addresses and entices such readers. The word limit for the Symposium is 100-250.

**How do you construct an abstract?**

In short, an abstract should include a statement of the problem, the motivation for your work, your approach, a summary of results, and any conclusions.

* **Problem statement:** What problem did your work try to solve, or what question did it explore?
* **Motivation:** Why does this question matter? Why should others care?
* **Approach/Methods:** In short, how did you go about solving this problem/exploring this question?
* **Results:** What did you find out?
* **Conclusions:** What are the implications for your work? How does this work add to the body of knowledge on the topic or the larger world?

**Abstract Templates/Examples**

Here is a template followed by several examples from the University of Wisconsin’s Writing Center site. In addition, you can view previous Symposium examples at <https://www.oberlin.edu/undergraduate-research/symposia/virtual-presentations>

Title of the project

Your name and major, Project advisor’s name

This first line gives a succinct description of the topic. (For example, “This project examines/my research explores X.”) Next is a sentence or two that gives a brief background on the topic. Now there’s a quick description of the methods or approach you used, with perhaps a quick mention of the limitations of other approaches to the same topic. Next is a line or two about what you found out. And finally there’s a statement about why this matters to your field or in other situations.

**“Margaret C. Anderson’s Little Review”**

**Sophia Estante and Lorrie Moore (Mentor), English**

This research looks at the work of Margaret C. Anderson, the editor of the Little Review. The review published first works by Sherwood Anderson, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, and Ezra Pound. This research draws upon mostly primary sources including memoirs, published letters, and a complete collection of the Little Review. Most prior research on Anderson focuses on her connection to the famous writers and personalities that she published and associated with.  This focus undermines her role as the dominant creative force behind one of the most influential little magazines published in the 20th Century. This case example shows how little magazine publishing is arguably a literary art.

**“The Tony Hawk Learning Project”**

**Lauren Silberman and Elisabeth (Betty) Hayes (Mentor), Curriculum & Instruction**

The study is to show how even a “sport” video game can incorporate many types of learning, to call attention to what might be overlooked as significant forms of learning, and to understand and take advantage of the opportunities video games afford as more deliberate learning environments. The aspects explored are the skills and techniques required to be successful in the game, the environment that skaters skate in, the personal vs. group identity that is shown through the general appearance of the skater, and the values and icons that the game teaches players. We are finding that sport video games support learning; we hope to find how one learns about oneself as a learner from playing.

**“Subtype of Autism: Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia”**

**Amanda Babin and Morton Gernbascher (Mentor), Psychology**

The purpose of this research is to identify a subtype of autism called Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia (DVD). DVD is a motor-speech problem, disabling oral-motor movements needed for speaking. The first phase of the project involves a screening interview where we identify DVD and Non-DVD kids. We also use home videos to validate answers on the screening interview. The final phase involves home visits where we use several assessments to confirm the child’s diagnosis and examine the connection between manual and oral motor challenges. By identifying DVD as a subtype of Autism, we will eliminate the assumption that all Autistics have the same characteristics. This will allow for more individual consideration of Autistic people and may direct future research on the genetic factors in autism.

## “Understanding Cell-Mediated Immune Responses Against Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV)"

### **Sean Spenser and John Loffredo, David Watkins (Mentors), Primate Research Center**

Each day 14,000 people become infected with HIV/AIDS, making the development of an effective vaccine one of the world’s top public health priorities.  David Watkins’ laboratory is attempting to develop HIV vaccines that elicit cellular immune responses utilizing the simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) – infected rhesus macaque animal model.  A major component of the cell-mediated immune response are cytotoxic T-lymphocytes (CTL).  It is thought that CTL play an important role in controlling HIV and SIV.  Most standard immunological assays do not measure antiviral activity directly, limiting our understanding of CTL effectiveness. To address this, the Watkins laboratory developed a novel neutralization assay that quantifies the ability of virus-specific CTL populations to control viral growth. Evaluating the antiviral activity of CTL of different specificities will identify those CTL most effective against SIV.  This information will likely impact the design of future HIV vaccines.