Thinking about Abstracts
Workshop

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Motivation

Why should you care about this workshop? Well, your career depends on your ability to communicate. Technical knowledge is necessary but not sufficient. So, you need these communication skills and the confidence that goes with having them. Why listen to me? Well, I've helped lots of people improve (from all over the world – there is no writing or talking gene), so this advice has been vetted.

Abstract

Students and faculty often struggle to get a write a paper or thesis abstract. The goal of this workshop is to improve your abstract writing skills. Since you are much more likely to be able to do something if you understand what others have done, first you will study some existing abstracts to see what each sentence's purpose is. Then you will learn to take an okay abstract and shorten it.

Required Preparation.

[I expect that you are an intrinsically motivated student, so of course you will prepare]

- Read "Thinking about Abstracts". Do at least some of the "work" in it.
- For a paper you've read for research or perhaps one of your own:
    a. Take its abstract and create a "purpose" table like that in Section 2
    b. Create a "polish" like that in Section 3 and squeeze out about 10% of its words
    c. (optional) Repeat task b several times - i.e., squeeze 'til it hurts.

- (optional) Read my One Draft thesis paper, especially page 13 where you will see a spread out paragraph.
- (optional) Put a sample of your writing through the writer's diet test. [writersdiet.com]

I will include your preparations in the workshop so:
Send me [carlis@umn.edu] the result of your preparations -- a 2 column purpose table and a polish table in a word file [.docx or .doc.] Include the paper's citation. I prefer this font: New Times Roman 10 point.]

Send them by noon on Tuesday, February 8.

If you are unwilling to share your prep work with other students in this and future workshops, explicitly tell me.

Bio

John Carlis is a Professor of Computer Science and Engineering and of Biomedical Informatics and Computational Biology. For the former he is Director of Undergraduate Studies, and for the latter he is Associate Director of Graduate Studies. He is a recipient of multiple teaching awards. His interdisciplinary research is in the use of Database Management Systems and extending them in biomedical contexts, including HIV-1and oral cancer.