Writing abstracts
1. What is an abstract?
   a. It’s not just a summary of your work – it’s an exceedingly clear description of work you have done that makes people want to hear (or read) more about it (especially, to get the details).
2. How is it used?
   a. Conference organizers and referees for the conference will use it to decide whether you should be included in the program.
   b. Conference attendees will use to decide if they should bother going to your presentation.
   c. After the conference, scholars will use it for a quick summary of your work, and to decide whether they should learn more about your work.
3. Who should see it before you submit it to a conference?
   a. Always: Your advisor.
   b. Recommended: Faculty who regularly attend that conference and other specialists in the area.
   c. Recommended: Someone who can make sure it makes sense to a general audience, if applicable.
   d. Recommended: Someone who can check your English, if applicable.
4. When should you give it to your advisor?
   a. In my opinion, at least one week before you need to send it.
   b. Reminder of LLL dates:
      i. February 3 – Show abstract to advisor
      ii. February 10 - Abstract deadline
      iii. April 8 - Conference day
5. Abstracts should:
   a. Be clear to someone who knows nothing about what you’ve done.
   b. Be concise. (Start long, then pare it down to the bare essentials.)
   c. Be specific. (Give example data. Fill in the steps in your logic.)
   d. Describe results (if possible). (Statistics may or may not be necessary, depending on the audience.)
   e. Be relevant to the conference or to general issues in the field. (It must convince the reviewers that it is not a waste of time for 25 – 300 people to listen to your presentation.)
   f. Cite essential references and describe essential background.
6. Abstract content
   a. Title. Should clearly capture what the talk is about (and how this talk is different from other presentations you or others have given). This is especially true if your title is cute. Remember that some scholars frown on cute titles.
   b. First paragraph. Should identify the phenomenon to be addressed, give an example or examples of it, say what the current study contributes to the understanding of it (does it contradict an existing theory, if so, exactly what about that theory does it contradict (with citations), and on what basis? Does it expand a particular theory to new phenomena? If so, on what basis, and why haven’t others noticed it?) The first paragraph should be short, perhaps 150 words or less.
   c. Middle. Presentation of the outline of the argument and data to be marshaled in favor of that argument. Make sure to be as specific as possible. Remember that you have now internalized many assumptions in the analysis. These must be made explicit to the reader, who is not you or your advisor. Break down your analysis into each logical step, and describe each of those.
   d. Last paragraph. Restate the main point of the paper and give some indications about its relevance to other aspects of linguistics, e.g. some larger theoretical question. It’s not enough that your topic is related to the conference's themes. Your research must have enough scientific merit to warrant its inclusion in the program.
7. Abstract formatting: Follow it to the letter. Do NOT overrun the word/page limit for any reason.
8. An abstract is somewhat like poetry. It is concise. It has a certain form (with variants for different conferences or publications). It is a thing of beauty when done well. It is not completely like poetry though; it makes explicit all logical steps in the argument. It avoids vagueness or ambiguity. An abstract is not a movie trailer. It does not try to show the exciting bits without explaining how they fit together. It is not mysterious.

9. Just because you've done something new doesn't mean someone else can tell why it's interesting or worthwhile for you to have done it. Make the reader want to care.

10. Don't overstate your claims. It's very unlikely that you can prove that theory X is wrong. You may indicate that you are going to argue this position, or that you will present evidence that is problematic for some view.

11. Don't feel like you need to leave out part of your analysis or its ramifications so you have something left for the talk. Give a complete summary of the argument.

12. Your abstract is part of a dialogue taking place among researchers in linguistics. Beyond getting into the conference, you want people to read the abstract and understand your work, even if they must miss your talk. Your abstract may live on for years on the internet or in the printed conference handbook. You want those who come to know what to expect. And you want people to come with intelligent questions and comments – you'll get better feedback if they can tell from the abstract exactly what your paper is about.

The review process for abstracts
In many conferences, your abstract will go to a group of referees (reviewers) for evaluation. They may or may not be experts in the area of your research. Their exact task depends on the conference; here's an example of the guidelines for them.

You will receive a set of 10 abstracts to evaluate. For each abstract, provide the information requested below.

1. Overall ratings:
   a. On a scale of 1-10, its appropriateness for a 45-minute paper.
   b. On a scale of 1-10, its appropriateness for a 20-minute paper.
   c. On a scale of 1-10, its appropriateness for a poster presentation.

   For each scale, 1 = "woeful" and 10 = "splendid".

   Consider the following points in making your evaluation:
   o Grounding: To what extent is the study sufficiently situated with respect to previous research and current issues?
   o Clarity and form of writing: How well structured, how well organized, and how well written is the abstract?
   o Theoretical/empirical significance: How likely is the study to make novel and important theoretical, empirical, or methodological contributions to the field?
   o Argumentation/methodology: How coherent is the line of reasoning? Is there a clear point being made? Are the data complete (or likely to be so by the time of the presentation) and appropriate to the research question? Is the analytical approach reasonable and sufficiently motivated? How sound is the logic, e.g., do the conclusions follow from the findings?
   o Any abstract that is beyond 500 words or reveals the author's name should be rejected without further review.

2. Detailed comments for authors and the conference committee
   These comments will be used by the committee to further assess the abstract, and will be passed on to the author, without your name. They should summarize the work in a sentence or two, and point out particularly strong or weak points.

3. Optional: comments for organizers
   These comments are not passed on to the authors. Examples might be that you think the work is very strong, but you feel it's not on an appropriate topic for the conference (e.g., an abstract about speech perception for a sentence processing conference).