**Article Abstract and Critical Appreciation**

From the syllabus:

The development of knowledge and skills associated with empirically demonstrated social policy and/or social program outcomes or other social work practice outcomes is important for effective social work practice. The purpose of this assignment is to increase the students' abilities to access and critically analyze outcome research and evaluation literature relevant to social welfare. **For each assignment, the informational abstract should focus in particular on the method, data, hypotheses and other elements. For each assignment, the critical appreciation should focus on aspects of the article’s research methods and the reader’s confidence in those methods and how they were used to support the conclusions reached.**

In instructor has prepared a Refworks database of several hundred articles which can be used as candidate articles for this assignment. In addition, students are encouraged to use the browsing guide on the website and visit the Central Michigan University Park Library to find a recent journal article that reports empirically-based outcomes derived from an evaluation of a social welfare benefit and/or a social work service. The article should have an already-prepared abstract as published in the journal. The student should email that provided short abstract of the article to the instructor so that he can approve the article to be used in this assignment. After approval of the article, the student will prepare an abstract of the article.

**Criteria for grading.** Grading is based on the abstract’s thoroughness and accuracy; clarity of writing and ability to convey the articles key points and methods. Also, please see the section, “Qualities of a good abstract,” at the bottom of the Guide to Writing Abstracts.

**Note:** This assignment will be returned with a grade reflecting the quality of the work as submitted. **However, the grade is contingent upon revising and re-submitting the work as suggested by the instructor and including it in the course portfolio handed in with the subsequent assignment, which is the evaluation of an evaluation research article.**

Not in the syllabus:

Additional instructions, additional information, further information on grading, a sample abstract, and further information on writing abstracts are below:

There are several aspects to this assignment. Please pay careful attention to each aspect of this assignment and how it is to be structured and formatted and conveyed to the instructor. These procedures are designed to ensure uniformity and to permit the building of a cumulative database of abstracts of articles for use by policy sequence students.

Here are the steps in the assignment.

1. Select a published journal article. (You should have one approved from the previous assignment posted on blackboard.)
2. Format the abstract using Times New Roman 12 point. At the upper left corner, put your name, course number, instructor, section #, year, all flush left and with one line for your name, one line for course name and number (SWK 450), one line for each other element.
3. Provide the APA style reference but skips the italics as I'll just be pasting it into the refworks database anyway. But be sure to put the issue number or month in parentheses after the volume number, and
the full first names of all authors. For example:


4. Drawing upon the following Guide to Writing Abstracts, write a 250-350 word, single-spaced, informative abstract. Format the abstract exactly as found in the sample abstract beginning on the next page, using the same headings. Make sure your article has sections which would permit the completion of an abstract with these headings; otherwise you will need to propose a different article. These sections mirror the standard sections found in empirical research reports, although the wording may change.

5. Drawing upon the following Guide and/or the Hansen article cited below in the Guide and handed out with the Guide, write a 75-100 word critical appreciation. At the left margin, write Critical Appreciation followed by a colon, and then begin your critical appreciation. This way the reader will be sure where the abstract ends and where the critical appreciation begins. The abstract will be returned if not properly formatted according to these instructions.

6. If you consent to what is explained below, please end the abstract with the following statement: Article and Critique by (Your Name), Winter 2004, reproduced with permission. It will then be used in my cumulative Refworks database of articles of interest to social work students (with student-written abstracts), which will be posted on Refworks.com and available only on a read only basis. If you do not consent, please merely note this and I will not use it. Your failure to consent would in no way influence grading in the assignment or course.

7. Following the above, please copy and paste the publisher/author abstract that was published with the article. This will help me easily compare the two, although your abstract will likely be longer and is written for a different purpose.

8. Please submit the assignment by attaching a Word or Wordperfect file of the assignment using the Assignment as posted in Blackboard. Assignments emailed to the instructor will be returned for submission in that manner.

Comments based upon grading of abstracts:

Grading is based upon 3/4th for the informative abstract, 1/4rd for the critical appreciation. Use past tense not future tense throughout. Be sure to specific sample size, research method, nature of data if research study. Try to identify the independent variables (factors thought to be influential) and dependent variables (what is being explained or effected by the independent variables). Re: length, between the two, 325 words is on the short side 450 words on the long side. You should avoid the use of quoted material in an abstract, despite the fact that it might seem informative. Avoid slang or informal wording. Overall grading is subjective, based upon a judgement of outstanding, excellent, very good, good, fairly good, fair, poor, etc. This is a 10 point assignment. Outstanding=10, Excellent=9.6, very good=9.0, good = 8.6, fairly good=8.0, fair 7.6, poor 6.6.

(Please turn the page)
Please structure your abstract using the same outline as in the following abstract:


Purpose of article:

This article addresses the reasoning for granting recognition to the baccalaureate-level social worker as a fully professional in 1970. This was made possible by a vote of the members of NASW. This article looks at reasons good and bad for granting BSW a fully professional.

Scope of article:

The article focuses on reasons people did and did not want BSW to be a fully professional and what this would do for the social work profession. In the 19390s by the events of the great depression there was a dramatic increase for social workers. The AASSW implemented the requirement that all professional education must be offered only at the master’s level. This was in affect until the 1960s when there was an increased demand for qualified social workers, NASW proposed to recognize graduates from accredited bachelor’s programs as fully professional. There were many arguments in favor of granting professional recognition to people with BSWs. One of the reasons was that the demand for social workers is far greater than the accredited MSW programs can produce in the foreseeable future. If social work doesn’t offer the services someone else will and likely it will not be as good as what the social worker could offer. Another reason was that reducing the educational requirement will open up the profession to more members of minority groups who do not have equal access to higher education. Another reason is potentially strong social workers will be recruited to other disciplines such as psychology because of having to go on to master level education. Reasons against making BSW a professional is that social workers have worked hard to become a recognized profession, going a step back to a less-educated membership would jeopardize social work’s future. Another reason was that BSW students were not mature enough to grasp complex social problems. They also feel that this would reduce agencies’ confidence in social workers. Another concern was that employing agencies would replace MSWs will less expensive BSWs. And still another reason was that undergraduate education could not be made attractive enough to draw any but the most minimal students to the major.

Method of article:

Abraham Flexner believed that the true professional contracts directly with the client, the private-practice model. In this method the professional is solely responsible for the services he or she provides and must have complete autonomy to determine with services are required. That model drove the professions to require ever increasing levels of education and impose more highly selective admission requirements for entering their educational programs. In general, the result was elite, white, male-dominated, and well-paid private
practitioners. Social work aspired to that private practice model, even though it was almost exclusively an agency-based profession where clients and service providers are brought together through an agency that monitors the work being conducted, therefore providing a layer of protection for clients. This increased status and financial benefits for social workers. However, it made the services inaccessible to clients who could not pay the premium prices.

Results of research reported:

The NASW expanded its membership requirements to recognize graduates of Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited baccalaureate programs as fully professional social workers.

Recommendations and/or discussion of results:

The article failed to specify what activities baccalaureate workers should be expected to perform and how that would differ from the master’s-level practitioner. They designated BSW as “generalist” and MSW at “specialist”. Another problem was on how to build the bachelor’s curriculum under the existing master’s programs. They needed to figure out how they would differentiate between the two. Another concern was what to do with the BSW graduate who then moved on to the master’s level. Should BSW be a requirement for entrance to the master’s level? And could there be a partial waiver to those who had BSWs were then going on to get their MSW.

Conclusions of article:

In 2000, social work was considered one of the fastest growing occupations in the U.S. It is expected to grow at a much faster than average rate than other professions. They defined exactly what a generalist is and it has become synonymous with baccalaureate social work. CSWE permitted up to one year of advanced standing to BSW students going on to get their MSW. Social work has become more ethnically diverse. They have defined the difference between jobs for MSWs and BSWs.

Critical Appreciation:

This article was very useful in learning about the development of social work as a profession and on controversies that were addressed. I think the author did an excellent job in looking at both sides for arguments. He looked at pros and cons for making BSW a recognized professional and I thought that was very impressive. This article really educated me about the background of BSW. I give this article an "A".

If you consent to use of your abstract in the cumulative refinworks database of completed abstracts by my research methods students type: Abstract and Critique by (Your Name), Winter 2004, reproduced with permission.
GUIDE TO WRITING ABSTRACTS and CRITICAL APPRECIATIONS
(For Use in Book and Article Reports)

What is an abstract?

What: An abstract is basically a condensation. It is a summary. It is “dense with information” (Hansen: 1998). An abstract is a condensed version of an original work: a book, journal article, technical report, patent, or sometimes a speech or an interview. The abstract tells enough about the original document that the reader can know whether to read the material if they want more details. To repeat: An abstract is a condensed version of a longer piece of writing that highlights the major points covered, concisely describes the content and scope of the writing, and reviews the writing's contents in abbreviated form.

Why: In many fields, it is important to read a great amount of information to keep informed with rapid changes in today's complex world. Abstracting journals and services enable one to better keep up with new, old, and foreign (many abstracts are translated into English) research and scholarship, by drastically shortening search and reading time; thus more can be read. Why are abstracts so important? The practice of using key words in an abstract is vital because of today's electronic information retrieval systems. For studying for a test, be sure to include the key concepts from the article that you think might be on the test.

Types: Three Major Kinds of Abstracts:

1. Indicative (descriptive) abstract -- tells very briefly (often in fewer than 100 words) what the original document is about. This kind is often used in colleges. They tell readers what information the report, article, or paper contains. They include the purpose, methods, and scope of the report, article, or paper. They do not provide results, conclusions, or recommendations. They are always very short, usually under 100 words. They introduce the subject to readers, who must then read the report, article, or paper to find out the author's results, conclusions, or recommendations.

2. Informative abstract--gives essential information about the content of the original work. Usually 150 to 300 words or up to 1/10 of the length the length of the original. This guide explains (below) how to write an informative abstract. Informative abstracts communicate specific information from a report, article, or paper. They include the purpose, methods, and scope of the report, article, or paper. They provide the report, article, or paper's results, conclusions, and recommendations. They are short -- from a paragraph to a page or two, depending upon the length of the original work being abstracted. Usually informative abstracts are 10% or less of the length of the original piece. They also allow readers to decide whether they want to read the report, article, or paper.

3. Critical abstract--the content of the original is described and evaluated. Seldom used in published abstracts, but valuable for learning how to critically evaluate an article once an informative abstract has already been written.

In this assignment, an informative abstract will be written and then a critical abstract addendum will evaluate the article.

Try writing some of each to see which you find most useful. Students often connect with what they agree with or disagree with about an article, and this can be a good guide to helping you remember the key points, so a combination of these types of abstracts may also be useful. Try just sticking on a critical or appreciative comment on the end of your abstract.

Five Steps to Writing an Informative Abstract and a Critical Conclusion:
1. Prepare to write the abstract. It might be useful to (a) photocopy the original, in order to (b) scan and underline the important points. (c) Check especially the first and last paragraphs. (d) Look for the purpose and scope of the document, as well as methods used in the research or experiment, results obtained, and conclusions. These will indicate what the author of the work believed to be important; therefore your abstract should summarize them. A good idea sometimes is to go on and read another article. Then come back to the article you want to abstract, and reread the article, paper, or report with the goal of abstracting in mind. Never write an abstract “later” if you haven’t just read the entire article or chapter. If there is an existing abstract at the front of the article, it is a good idea to cover it up with a post-it note and not read it, as this will make it harder for you to write your own abstract and will help protect you against unconscious plagiarism from the original abstract.

*Look specifically for the following parts of the article, paper, or report and identify them, perhaps using color coded methods: purpose, methods, scope, results, conclusions, and recommendation.

*Use the headings, outline heads, and table of contents as a guide to writing your abstract.

*If you're writing an abstract about another person's article, paper, or report, the introduction and the summary are good places to begin. These areas generally cover what the article emphasizes.

2. Begin to write the abstract. Plagiarism is not a problem here (meaning of the article, rather than any pre-existing abstract, which surely shouldn’t be copied or paraphrased or quoted, although it might help to study the structure of that abstract itself and see how it relate to the structure of the abstract as provided here). Try to be specific, using the same terminology as the original, to be accurate, although for this assignment you should put quotes around actual quotes that are more than a single word or concept. Here is one example of where you don’t really want to paraphrase when citing the author’s own words would produce a better abstract. But if the author’s words are too long to convey the author’s meaning, then condense. So, you can copy key sentences from the article, paper, or report, but you must protect yourself against presenting too much information. Write as concisely and clearly as possible. Summarize the main points of the original work. Be complete, --but make it easy to read (make every word count).

Another, alternative approach is, after you’ve finished rereading the article, paper, or report, write a rough draft without looking back at what you’re abstracting. In this way you won’t merely rely on the way material was phrased in the article, paper, or report: you’ll summarize information in a new way. Try rephrasing ideas from the original document in your own words to condense the meaning into fewer words than the original used.

In essence, abstracts inform the reader of six bits of information about the piece of writing being summarized, and these should be in the body of the abstract (A. purpose, B. scope, C. method, D. results, E. recommendations (if any), F. Conclusions (if any).

A. Purpose: What is the author's reason for writing? What is the author's main idea? In the social sciences, what is the problem, research question, or hypothesis?

B. Scope: What is the author's focus in this piece? Where does the author concentrate his/her attention?

C. Method: What kinds of evidence does the author provide? How does the author try to convince the reader of the validity of his/her main idea? Describe the method used, in other words, HOW does the author answer the question. In some cases, there won’t be formal research methods, but you can still discuss the approach taken by the writer.

D. Results: What are the consequences of the problem or issue that the author is discussing? What did the author find out? In some cases, there won’t be “results” as such, but there will usually be information conveyed and you can summarize that.

E. Recommendations: What solutions does the author present to the reader to resolve the problem of issue in the piece? Does the author recommend action or change in his/her piece? How significant does the author feel the results are?
F. Conclusions: Does the author describe a 'cause and effect' relationship or explain the origins of this issue or problem? What conclusions does the author draw from his/her study of the issue or problem?

Abstracts can vary in length, from about a paragraph (with a sentence for each of the above) or to about 2/3rds of a page of single spaced text with ample space at the top for the full citation and some room at the bottom as well. For this assignment, the abstract should be between 250-350 words, and the critical abstract addendum should be another 50-100 words. (If each point above, for example, got its own sentence, then the abstract would be six sentences long. Many writers find that they can combine several of the sentences of the abstract when the ideas are closely related.) However, often you will find your first draft can and should be longer, perhaps a full page of single spaced text, which you can then shorten and make more concise. Of course, once you get good at it you can write shorter the first time, and this requires less editing for length later.

4. Check this rough draft. Omit unimportant words and details. Have all important concepts been noted, however? Be particularly careful to note any safety precautions if the original item mentions such. Also, revise your rough draft to correct weaknesses in organization.

*improve transitions from point to point.
*drop unnecessary information.
*add important information you left out.
*eliminate wordiness.
*fix errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
*Print your final copy and read it again to catch any glitches that you find.

5. Reread and shorten further, if possible. Check for proper grammar and spelling.

6. You have now written a good or excellent abstract. You have 250-350 words written. (You know, because in Microsoft Word you highlighted the text of your abstract and you sent Tools, Word Count.) Now you have about 100 more words to write. And this time you get to express your opinion. You are starting from a position of knowing your material fully. The fact that you have now written an abstract means you are perhaps one of the few people other than the author who has truly thoroughly read the article! You might be surprised to learn how few people actually read most published literature.

Perhaps all along you have been writing down your own opinions about the piece you are abstracting. That’s fine, but please keep in mind that your opinions shouldn’t be reflected in the earlier part of your abstract, the informative abstract. Your opinions must be kept out of there entirely! You can’t even note things that are not included in the article or book unless the author also pointed out their absence, in which case you might mention that. But in your critical abstract conclusion you can express your opinions. But they must be well-reasoned and balanced.

A good way to begin is to imagine that you were an anonymous reviewer at a journal. You will want to engage in critical reflection about the piece. By critical, I don’t just mean negative. Critical reflection can involve both praise and condemnation. It can involve pointing out omissions and shaky logic, but can also involve appreciative comments. Often the two can be combined. So you might say, “On the one hand, there was a tremendous amount of data collected, on the other hand the sample was biased.” You might say, “The piece might be improved by…”, or you could say, simply, “There is nothing wrong with it.” I remember when Prof. Mark Mizruchi reportedly said that about my sociology prelim essay. I was insulted! It took me a while until I realized it was actually a compliment! So you might ask yourself, “Is there anything wrong with it?” You are in the driver’s seat here. You have to fight any impulse you have to be overly critical or overly praiseful, as this kind of thing can often be traced to a person’s basic optimism or pessimism or basically critical or supportive personality. Try to overcome this and focus in on the material itself.

In order to help focus your critical abstract conclusion, you can start by looking at the very elements of your abstract. What is your evaluation of the author’s A. purpose, B. scope, C. method, D. results, E. recommendations (if any), F. Conclusions (if any). If you got ambitious, you could consult a books which discusses how to critique published research. For instance, see: Katzer, Jeffrey; Cook, Kenneth H, and
Qualities of a Good Abstract

An effective abstract has the following qualities, according to LEO, Literacy Education Online, where it was written by Judith Kilborn for the Writing Lab at Purdue University; who revised it for LEO and the Write Place, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, Minnesota. As pointed out in the original site, although copyrights, it may be copied for educational purposes only, such as below.

URL: http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/bizwrite/abstracts.html

http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/bizwrite/abstracts.html

"*uses one or more well developed paragraphs: these are unified, coherent, concise, and able to stand alone.
*uses an introduction/body/conclusion structure which presents the article, paper, or report's purpose, results, conclusions, and recommendations in that order.
*follows strictly the chronology of the article, paper, or report but not necessarily it’s exact form of organization.
*provides logical connections (or transitions) between the information included.
*adds no new information, but simply summarizes the report.
*is understandable to a wide audience.
*easy to read.

Other qualities of a good abstract are, according to:
http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/advice/writing_abstracts.htm
This website was adapted from: Day, Robert A. How to Write & Publish a Scientific Paper. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995—see pages 29-32.

* uses familiar words. If unfamiliar words are necessary, define them.
* avoids jargon.
* uses short sentences, but vary sentence structure so that the abstract doesn't sound choppy.
* uses complete sentences. Don't omit articles or other little words in an effort to save space.
* unless the abstract is very short (100-125 words), is divided it into several paragraphs.
* is concise.
* "uses an introduction-body-conclusion structure in which the parts of the report are discussed in order: purpose, findings, conclusions, recommendations" (http://www.cameron.edu/~carolynk/Abstracts.html)
* "is exact and unambiguous" (http://www.cameron.edu/~carolynk/Abstracts.html)
* uses the same tone and emphasis that the original used. However, it is not necessary to follow the author's organization, wording, or even proportions. The more poorly the original article is written, the more changes you will need to make in the abstract.