

Breakdown of Sample Abstracts

Below are 5 color-coded questions you should address when writing your abstract.

Question #1: Problem to be investigated: Why was the project undertaken?

Question #2: The purpose of the study: What is the nature of the project and how does it differ from other, similar projects?

Question #3: The methods: What were the important steps in performing the project?

Question #4: The major results: What are the major results—not necessarily all of the results—of the project so far?

Question #5: The interpretation and implications: What did you learn from the results, and why are these results important?

Here are illustrations of how these questions were answered in three sample abstracts. The highlight color of each area corresponds with the highlight color of the questions above.

Science Abstract--Title: Persistent Global Activation of the Aplysia Serotonergic System after Sensitizing Stimuli

The marine mollusk *Aplysia* responds to noxious stimulation with a stereotyped arousal reaction that includes escape locomotion, increased heart rate and sensitization of defensive reflexes.

Although previous studies have shown that serotonin (5-HT) is important for most of these behavioral responses, it is still unclear how the 5-HT system is activated in response to noxious stimuli. To address this question, I used a specific staining of the 5-HT neurons in the living central nervous system (CNS) that allowed me to (1) systematically record their electrical activity following a noxious stimulus, and (2) trace their projections using the neuronal tracer Neurobiotin. I found that in response to tail-nerve shock, a procedure known to mimic a noxious tail stimulus, the vast majority of 5-HT neurons increased their firing rate for several minutes and became more excitable. 5-HT neurons were found to project toward various peripheral targets such as the gill, heart, body wall, tail, siphon, head, and tentacles as well as to other ganglia in the CNS. This study shows that the *Aplysia* 5-HT system is globally and persistently activated after a noxious stimulus. Such an activation might serve to synchronize the different aspects of the arousal reaction in *Aplysia*.

Social Sciences Abstract--Title: Stereotype Threat

The stereotype threat theory (Steele 1992, 1997) examines the underperformance of women in mathematical domains and minorities in academic domains and attempts to explain these trends as being due to situational anxiety. Research indicates that the performance differential between genders and ethnicities can be best understood in terms of stereotype threat activation rather than biological determinants. The anxiety a stereotyped individual feels when confronted with an academic task is compounded by a societal expectation of failure. However, not much research currently exists on the mediating effects of personal belief in the stereotype. The goal of this study was to examine whether anxiety was correlated with a stronger belief in the stereotype among college-aged participants.

Individuals from stigmatized groups demonstrated a significantly greater likelihood to experience higher anxiety levels if they believed the negative stereotype and that higher anxiety level correlated with lower test scores. These results provide general support for Steele's stereotype threat hypothesis.

Humanities Abstract--Title: Cristina Peri Rossi The Postmodern Transgressions of Parody and Ambiguity

Uruguayan writer Cristina Peri Rossi's first book, *El libro de mis primos* (The Book of My Cousins, 1969), is compared with her later novel, *La nave de los locos* (The Ship of Fools, 1984), to suggest how an authoritarian society can be criticized through parody and then rebuilt on the foundations of a philosophy of ambiguity, similar to Lyotard's vision of the postmodern. Dissatisfaction with the power structures of tradition and validation of marginality are characteristics of such vision, which inscribe Peri Rossi in the postmodern current of Latin American literature. The postmodern condition agrees with the major conclusions drawn from both works. First, tradition is viewed as a decadent state of affairs that needs to be brushed aside, for it does not respond to genuine human concerns and, in fact, has frustrated and destroyed them. Parody is the tool used to dispose of tradition. Secondly, there has to be an acceptance of the margins, of the other. This presupposes a tolerant ambiguity of inclusion that is capable of rebuilding instead of destroying, and does so by using the very materials of the other. What *El Libro* destroys *La nave* rebuilds. *El Libro*'s mission is to do away with the atrophied waste of patriarchal order, while *La nave* seeks to fill up the resulting void with one possible solution: the conciliation of opposing forces by a tolerant philosophy of inclusion.