Assignment Details

Abstracts (Due October 11th)

Abstracts should be ~300 words. This is not a strict word limit, just a useful guideline. Use abstracts of papers we have read as a model.

I’m a big fan of the ice cream cone¹ method (see figure) as a useful framework for thinking about organizing your communications.

Start with the big and fluffy - briefly describe the problem or area you are discussing and why the reader should care. This is the thing that keeps them reading and not falling asleep, very key.

From there things narrow down to your key point – for example, you could briefly describe the various approaches to solving said problem that you will cover.

At this stage (for the abstract and given your preliminary research), you won’t go into detail about individual experiments but maybe make some broad statements about them.

Also, the writing should be pretty concise, and usually pretty dry (I take it as a personal challenge to try to be peppy) and typically in the 3rd person².

Bibliography
Abstracts should be accompanied by a brief bibliography. By bibliography I mean 4-8 references, that you have found and looked at in at least a little bit of detail, with a brief summary of the information included in them (~2-4 sentences).

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¹ I like ice cream quite a bit. Not actually a big fan of the cone typically… but the metaphor doesn’t work as well with ice cream in a cup.
² Note that back of the day it was the custom for scientific writing to be in the 3rd person…. Terrible stuff. But we have reached a more enlightened place.