Guidelines For Writing Structured Research Abstracts for Posters and Manuscripts

An abstract is a concise summary of work or a project. It is a stand-alone document designed to provide the reader with a condensed form of the information that is presented in a poster, lecture, or a manuscript. An abstract should therefore cover all aspects of the poster or manuscript in a shortened form. Typically, an abstract is a single paragraph narrative. However, for some journals and in some disciplines, the abstract is separated into sub-paragraphs with headings to help orient the reader to the specific parts of the study**.**

For the VCOM Via Research Recognition Day at the Virginia Campus, **it is required for students to submit structured abstracts with the appropriate delineated headings as described below.** We ask all other poster presenters to consider using this format for their abstract as well. Abstracts should be 750 words max and should use 11pt Calibri font. (The Abstract Submission form is set to 11pt Calibri font).

Abstracts are accepted in one of two major categories: Original research and Clinical Case Reports. For Original research, the minimum number of headings to be used should include Background/Context, Objective/Hypothesis, Methods, Results, and Conclusions. For Clinical Case Reports, the headings may be modified to Context, Report of Case, Comments, Diagnosis, Treatment, and Conclusion. The descriptions below should help one understand what information is expected in each category of headings, and thus, in a well drafted abstract.

Original Research Abstracts:

Context: Summary of the rationale for the study including the larger health problem or bigger cellular process that is impacted by the research presented in the paper or poster. The point of this introductory statement(s) is to illustrate how the research impacts a larger health problem and current body of literature. This is typically two-three sentences.

Objective and/or Hypothesis: Statement of the goal of the project, such as: “To test…” or “To determine…” Usually limited to the primary objective of the work, but secondary or supportive objectives may be included for clarity. This is typically one sentence. This should tie into the context and be supported by the methods presented in the abstract. The hypothesis is a question directly tested by the research or the hypothesis formulated and tested by the experiments presented in the paper or poster. This can be a little as one sentence, but it may blend into the methods used to test the hypothesis. [We tested this by this method and then tested this by this other method.]

Methods: This should briefly explain the detailed methods of the study utilized to achieve the research objective. Items that are typically included are: the study design, setting, population/sample, variables or outcomes, data collection methods, and analysis approach.

Results: A summary of the main results obtained along with a short statement about the importance of these results in light of the overall study design. Include statistical significance and confidence intervals where appropriate. If the study is currently in progress and results are not complete, please state that in this section.

Conclusion(s): A summary of the conclusion(s) that are directly supported by the study results. These conclusions should relate to the question posed by the research and should not include speculation about the impact of the results on larger public health issues.

IRB Statement: If the original research project is subject to IRB approval, authors are asked to include a statement at the end of the abstract to the effect of: This study was approved by the XYX IRB, protocol number ####.

Clinical Case Report Abstracts:

Context: Summary of the case, highlighting the unique aspects of the presentation or diagnosis and the epidemiology of the disease process investigated or impacted by this knowledge. Typically, one or two sentences.

Report of Case: A presentation of the patient history, physical examination, imaging, laboratory testing and other diagnostics pertinent to the case. Describe key symptoms and findings; don't just state that exams or tests were performed. Include the patient course and any medical events encountered through diagnosis, outcomes, and treatment.

Comments: Compare and contrast the current clinical case to medical literature. Include the sources used to investigate the literature to show thoroughness of the background investigation. It might be useful to have a subheading for 'Methods' to indicate what search terms were used and what resources were used to search those terms. Highlight the similarities or differences in patient presentation, diagnostics, outcome, or treatment provided in the clinical case.

Diagnosis: Restate the final diagnosis and provide a level of certainty for the reader.

IRB Statement: The VCOM IRB does not require IRB approval for single patient case reports since these are reports and not original research. This will hold true for Research Day case report abstracts. However, most journals now require proof of consent from the

subject of the case report as a condition for publication. If a case report author has consent from a patient for the case report abstract, a statement to this effect can be included such as: The authors obtained consent from the patient to use their data for this case report. But this is not required.