

Guidelines for writing and submitting abstracts to VCOM Research Day

Submission deadline: Friday, November 20, 2026 at 11:59pm, No late submissions will be accepted

What is an abstract?

An abstract is a concise, stand-alone summary of a research project or clinical case. It condenses the information presented in a poster, lecture, or manuscript so a reader can understand the work without seeing the full presentation. For some journals or poster competitions, abstracts are written as a single narrative paragraph. However, for VCOM Research Day, students are required to submit structured abstracts, meaning the abstract is broken into labeled sections rather than written as one continuous paragraph.

This guide is specific to VCOM Carolinas Research Day submissions

The structure and instructions below reflect VCOM Research Day requirements. Structure, formatting, and word limits will vary depending on the event. Always confirm the requirements in the official call for abstracts before finalizing and submitting your abstract.

Word Limit

The word limit is 750 words total across all sections of the abstract. This includes titles, headers, etc. Submissions that exceed 750 words will be returned to the author. Submission deadlines will **not** be extended for editing; if an abstract is too long and not resubmitted by the deadline, it will be rejected.

Submission Instructions

Abstracts must be submitted through the official VCOM Carolinas Research Day submission portal via this link:

[VCOM-Carolinas Research Recognition Day 2027 Abstract Submission Form – Fill out form](#)

- Presenter(s)
 - List only the person(s) who will present the poster. (Maximum of 3; contributing authors will be added later)
- Identify your mentor/PI and affirm that they have already approved your submission. If an abstract is submitted without prior approval from the PI, the abstract will be rejected from Research Day. A copy of the abstract will be sent to your PI upon submission.
- Record your MeSH terms (3-5 terms)
 - Learn about MeSH here: [NIH: National Library of Medicine: Welcome to Medical Subject Headings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medical_Subject_Headings)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medical_Subject_Headings
- Record your ICD-10 codes (for case reports)
- Enter your abstract title in ALL CAPS, max of 180 characters
- Authors
 - if your credential or institutional affiliation is not listed, choose “Other” and enter as free text
- Choose your Poster Classification: Abstracts are accepted in one of two broad categories:
 - **Original Research:** Use this category if your project involved collecting or analyzing data to test a hypothesis or answer a research question.
 - **Case Reports:** Use this category if your project describes a single patient case, its diagnostic or treatment course, and its relationship to the existing medical literature.
 - After determining which category is most appropriate for your submission, choose a sub-category:

<u>Original research</u> ▪ Biomedical research ▪ Clinical research ▪ Simulation ▪ Education ▪ Community/public health	<u>Case reports</u> ▪ Case report - anatomy ▪ Case report - clinical
---	--
 - Enter your abstract in the appropriate fields. The exact fields available may differ based on which classification you select (see below).

Original Research: All original research abstracts must include the following (max 750 words)

Context: Briefly explain why this research matters. State the larger health problem or biological process the study addresses, and how the research fits into the current body of literature. This section is typically two to three sentences.

Objective and/or Hypothesis: State the goal of the project, for example "To test..." or "To determine..." This is usually limited to the primary objective, though secondary objectives may be included for clarity, and is typically one sentence. It should connect clearly to the Context and be supported by the Methods described below. If your project is hypothesis driven, state the specific hypothesis being tested.

Methods: Briefly describe how the study was conducted. Typically, this includes the study design, setting, population or sample, key variables or outcomes measured, data collection methods, and analysis approach.

Results: Summarize the main findings and briefly note their significance in light of the overall study design. Include statistical significance and confidence intervals where appropriate. If the study is still in progress and results are not yet complete, state that clearly in this section.

Conclusion(s): Summarize the conclusions that are directly supported by your results. Conclusions should relate specifically to the research question posed and should not speculate about broader public health implications beyond what the data supports.

Case Reports: All case report abstracts must include the following (max 750 words)

Context: Briefly summarize the case, highlighting what makes the presentation or diagnosis unique, along with the epidemiology of the disease process involved. This is typically one to two sentences.

Report of Case: Present the patient history, physical examination findings, imaging, laboratory testing, and other diagnostics relevant to the case. Describe key symptoms and findings directly, rather than simply stating that exams or tests were performed. **Include** the patient's clinical course and any notable events through diagnosis, treatment, and outcome.

Comments: Compare and contrast the current case with the existing medical literature. Include the sources used to investigate the literature to demonstrate the thoroughness of your background research. It can be useful to add a brief subheading for Methods to indicate what search terms and resources were used. Highlight the similarities or differences between this case and prior reported cases in presentation, diagnostics, outcome, or treatment.

Example abstract using the Original Research, education subcategory selection

AN ABSTRACT ABOUT WRITING BETTER ABSTRACTS

Context: Structured abstract guidelines were needed to keep VCOM Research Day submissions consistent, but the set of instructions written years ago for "abstracts in general" did not adequately address what this one specific event actually needed. Left unclarified, students are stuck guessing whether the word limit is gospel or just a suggestion, and reviewers get some Results sections labeled "Findings" and others labeled "Bruh, look at this data." Something had to be done.

Objective/Hypothesis: To determine whether a densely worded, one size fits all guidelines document could be reworked into something students would actually read, without losing any of the substance a Research Day reviewer expects to see.

Methods: The original document was reviewed for structure, clarity, and scope. Content was reorganized into discrete sections (What is an abstract, Word Limit, choosing a category, and the abstract frameworks), each given its own heading rather than being folded into a single wall of text. Language specific to VCOM Research Day was added explicitly, since the original read as though it applied to abstract writing everywhere, for all time. While the author would like to believe that he has this level of authority, that is simply not reality. Portal specific submission details were gathered and added so students would have one place to go, rather than piecing instructions together from an email and a webpage. Formatting choices (plain bold headings, no decorative tables, standard margins) were communicated, and the draft reviewed several times to make sure it flowed like the literary masterpiece that it is.

Results: The reworked document is a bit longer than the original version, with clearly labeled sections instead of a narrative that ran headings together. The word limit went from being stated as a fact to being stated as a fact with an asterisk, which is the correct amount of hedging for something that can change year to year. No narwhals were harmed in the creation of this document.

Conclusion(s): A guidelines document can be made significantly more usable without changing what it actually requires of students. Whether this abstract itself would pass VCOM Research Day review is a separate question, and probably one best left untested. This abstract, including title, headers, and this closing sentence, runs 409 words: well under the 750-word hard limit, because the space being available is not the same as the space being required, and a shorter, clearer abstract beats a longer one every time.