# UCI Undergraduate Comparative Literature Conference

Frequently Asked Questions

### Can my presentation be based on my senior thesis or a term paper?

Yes. Many of the best presentations grow out of earlier work. Do not, however, submit a summary of the thesis or paper as your abstract. Your presentation has to stand on its own, with a clear thesis that you can develop in fifteen minutes. Writing the abstract will help you decide which part of the larger project to present.

### Don't forget the title!

A good title names your argument or points the reader toward it. If you have trouble writing one, your central argument may need more work.

### Should I use quotations and bibliographic references in the abstract?

Avoid quotations in the abstract. In a text this short, they take space away from your own ideas. You also do not need full citations: naming the authors and works you will analyze is enough. Your conference paper, by contrast, should quote and cite the texts it analyzes.

### What should my abstract and my paper do? A checklist

The abstract and the conference paper should do the same things at different lengths. The abstract states what your paper will argue, and the paper carries the argument out. Use this checklist when you write the abstract, and again when you write and revise the paper you will present.

- **States a main argument.** In the abstract, state your claim in one or two sentences. In the paper, state it early, build each section toward it, and restate it at the end. A text that only names a topic (“This paper explores…”) does not yet have an argument.
- **Keeps a manageable scope.** Avoid being too broad. Fifteen minutes is about seven or eight double-spaced pages read aloud, enough to support one claim about one or two works, not a survey of a period, a genre, or a thinker's whole output.
- **Is specific.** In the abstract, name the texts, passages, images, or cases you will discuss and say what you will show about them. In the paper, analyze them closely. Terms like “society,” “identity,” or “power” need to be tied to something concrete.

- **Has an artifact.** Ground your argument in an object of analysis: a novel, poem, film, painting, archival document, game, advertisement, or other cultural object. In the paper, give your audience enough of it to follow your reading, such as a quotation on a handout or an image on a slide. Theory with nothing to read rarely makes a strong conference paper.
- **Signals your approach.** In the abstract, name your methodological or theoretical framework, or the authors you will work with. In the paper, put that framework to work on your artifact instead of summarizing it.
- **Shows the stakes.** Say why the argument matters: what it changes in how we read your artifact or understand the theme.
- **Is written to be heard.** Your paper will be read aloud. Write sentences a listener can follow, tell the audience where the argument is going, and avoid long quotations they cannot see.
- **Fits the time.** Read the paper aloud and time it before the conference. A paper that runs over fifteen minutes takes time from the other speakers on your panel and from the discussion.
- **Has a title and has been proofread.** See “Don't forget the title!” above, and proofread both the abstract and the paper before you submit them.