How to Write an Abstract
MFA THESIS CATALOG
An abstract is a short (200-300 words), objective description of your thesis work, in a clearly written prose document. This is not the place for poetic or creative writing, since it is aimed at the outside general public.

The main purpose is to provide readers of this catalog with useful information about your body of work, but not an artist statement as much as a critical description of the work and its influences, process and relation to any relevant theoretical elements.

An abstract should allow a reader to get a sense of the works in the exhibition, and information about your exhibit without requiring them to view the actual body of work.
Keep in mind the ABCs of a good abstract:

• **Accuracy**—a good abstract includes only information included in the thesis exhibit.

• **Brevity**—a good abstract gets straight to the point, contains precise language, and does not include superfluous adjectives.

• **Clarity**—a good abstract does not contain jargon or colloquialisms and always explains any acronyms.
The Indicative Abstract

If you are writing an abstract for a less-structured document like an essay, editorial, or book, or an exhibit, you will write an indicative abstract.

An indicative abstract is generally made up of three parts:

• Scope
• Concepts Addressed
• Conclusions

The scope section of an indicative abstract should state the range of the material dealt with in the exhibit as well as the starting premise of your thesis. For instance, in an abstract for an exhibit on Matisse’s work would state that this particular exhibit focuses on the blue cut-paper collages of his work late in life.

The concepts addressed section of an indicative abstract should state the main concept(s) employed in the thesis paper. These concepts should be stated in the same progression in which they appear in the paper, and as they appear in the exhibit. Not all exhibits contain a progression of concepts; in some cases this section may outline a narrative progression instead.

The conclusions section of an indicative abstract should state the exhibit’s visual concept in conjunction with the thesis concept.
Seeking the origins of the “gamine” – the waiflike, tomboy young girl, “frank and mischievous, fearless and iconic, sexually knowledgeable but chaste” – in the writings and fashions of Colette as well as the fashion revolutions of Coco Chanel, this work will look at the peculiar entry of a feminine subject on the peripheries of late 19th and early 20th centuries mainstream Parisian culture that challenged the rigorous gender specificity in fashions of the time.

As a soft rebellion that also titillated male attentions, the “gamine,” sporting fashions derived from working class male clothing of the time, presented an adorable and oddly sturdy identity with a specific fashion style that has continued almost unchanged until the present time. What are the cultural conditions and consequences of this “modernist” subject and how has history translated this identity into current forms? The meanings and attributes of this seductive feminine subject and her strange durability in the contemporary culture reveal much about the gender “liberations” currently underway.

(from Soft Transgressions: Gamine Fashion in the Early 20th Century, Frenchy Lunning)

164 words — short but OK
“How could drawing be of itself and not about something else?” Having asked this question in 1973, I have gone on to answer it in visually compelling and intellectually provocative ways that tested the bounds of my traditional drawing practice. This exhibition examines my groundbreaking project Drawing Which Makes Itself, of 1972–73, while highlighting the ideas that I have pursued throughout my career.

I have said that paper has terrific importance for me: I came to realize that a piece of paper is a metaphysical object. You write on it, you draw on it, you fold it. I am interested in paper not just as the ground for a drawing but as an active material, its inherent qualities determining the form of the artwork. This is clear in works like Scalar (1971), with its planes of chipboard and paper stained with crude oil, and in the carbon-paper drawings installed on both the wall and the floor, a series on view here in depth for the first time in forty years.

I also studied with a mathematician, Max Dehn, in the early 1950s, and his teachings on the underlying geometries in nature and art affected me profoundly. My Golden Section Paintings (first exhibited in 1974 at this museum), as well as several series of works on paper that followed, refer to a mathematical ratio used by artists and architects since antiquity to produce shapes of harmonious proportions. My work of later decades, including recent watercolors on view at the exhibition’s entrance, continues my exploration of these principles in nature, and specifically in the motion of planets.

(Bastardized from MoMA website: Dorothea Rockburne: Drawing Which Makes Itself)

277 words — ideal
Images of an Infinite Film brings together works that, through structural or material intervention, emulate processes of human knowing or thought, function as scores for imagined films, or take form entirely in the mind of the viewer. Taking as a point of departure avant-garde filmmaker Hollis Frampton’s notion of an “infinite film,” which theorizes an overarching history of all recorded images and likens the universe to an endless film archive, my exhibition suggests a link between the precarious nature of memory, the fragility of film, and the subjective experience of assigning meaning to things in the world.

In this work, I construct a speculative portrait of Henry Molaison (known in scientific literature as “Patient H.M.”), who was left with a radical form of amnesia after undergoing experimental brain surgery to treat epilepsy in 1953. A modified looping system presents two different parts of the film simultaneously, creating a dissonance that evokes Molaison’s continual "rewriting" of information. Poetic Justice (1972), part two in Frampton’s seven-part Hapax Legomena (1971–72), presents frame-by-frame instructions for a film to be completed by the viewer’s own reservoir of images and associations. Disrupted by a series of spatial and temporal inconsistencies, the work confounds the viewer’s desire to formulate a linear narrative.

My Frozen Film Frame series (c. 1971–76), is comprised of hundreds of strips of film placed between suspended sheets of Plexiglas. Laying bare the tangibility of the medium itself, the work’s countless fragments unfold with the viewer’s stream of consciousness. At first glance, my Time As Activity - Düsseldorf (1969), appears to document the city “as it is,” but before each shot, the viewer is confronted with its precise duration. The work is at once both pure structure and completely amorphous, underscoring the idea of time as a fiction. Color Pieces (1980), my video honoring Nan Hoover, deconstructs a fleeting moment into a subtly shifting topography of light and shadow.

(Bastardized from Images of an Infinite Film on MoMA website)
word count 330 — ideal