**Checklist: Parts of an Abstract**

Despite the fact that an abstract is quite brief, it must do almost as much work as the multi-page paper that follows it. Each section is typically a single sentence, although there is room for creativity. In particular, the parts may be merged or spread among a set of sentences. Use the following as a checklist for your next abstract:

* **Motivation:**  
  *Why do we care* about the problem and the results? If the problem isn't obviously "interesting" it might be better to put motivation first; but if your work is incremental progress on a problem that is widely recognized as important, then it is probably better to put the problem statement first to indicate which piece of the larger problem you are breaking off to work on. This section should include the importance of your work, the difficulty of the area, and the impact it might have if successful.
* **Problem statement:**  
  What *problem* are you trying to solve? What is the *scope* of your work (a generalized approach, or for a specific situation)? Be careful not to use too much jargon. In some cases it is appropriate to put the problem statement before the motivation, but usually this only works if most readers already understand why the problem is important.
* **Approach:**  
  *How did you go about solving* or making progress on the problem? What important *variables* did you control, ignore, or measure?
* **Results:**  
  *What's the answer?* Avoid vague, hand-waving results such as "very", "small", or "significant." If you must be vague, you are only given license to do so when you can talk about orders-of-magnitude improvement.
* **Conclusions:**  
  *What are the implications* of your answer? Is it going to change the world (unlikely), be a significant "win", be a nice hack, or simply serve as a road sign indicating that this path is a waste of time (all of the previous results are useful). Are your results *general*, potentially generalizable, or specific to a particular case?