



Abstract Writing Guidelines and Tips for Conference Submission

By: Kristy A. Siegel, MPH, CHES – Programming co-Chair APHA-SA



Attending a professional or scientific conference meeting is an important part of any student's education; however, presenting at one is an even more valuable experience. But difficulty arises in getting an abstract accepted for presentation. This should not hinder your decision in submitting an abstract. These tips and guidelines will help you increase your chances of becoming a presenter.

To prepare an abstract you must first know and understand the purpose of an abstract, which is an accurate representation of the contents of a document in an abbreviated form. This "snapshot" is the only thing reviewers have to judge the worthiness of your project. Therefore, it is up to you to **make your project appear innovative, exciting, relevant, or whatever the criteria might be**. Having said that, the component parts of the abstract are title and authors, background, methods, results, and conclusions, and sometimes learning objectives.

The title is the first thing reviewers see on your abstract – immediately creating an impression. Therefore make sure the title is descriptive enough to let the reviewer know what to expect but not too wordy to turn the reviewer off. It might also help to be clever with your title by including a pun or something attention grabbing.

TIP: Know each conference/meeting's guidelines for writing a title, which vary meeting to meeting. If your title is incorrectly written (too many characters or improper capitalization), then the reviewers most likely have already determined that your abstract is sloppily-written and now will be reading specifically looking for errors to confirm this impression.

All reviews are conducted using a blind peer-reviewed panel, so you might think that it is not important to correctly prepare the authors section, but **this is one of the last components that can hurt you**. Once abstracts have been reviewed and scored, the programming chair(s) must decide on which of the abstracts make the cut and at this time have the availability to view the author section. Based on the quality of an abstract, chairs can make leeway to accept a lower scored abstract written by an undergraduate student than a higher one written by a doctoral student.

TIP: Give the exact degrees and credentials of the authors, as required by the conference guidelines.

TIP: With most conferences the first author is considered the presenter, but check with the conference for its guidelines. Also, some universities and departments have their own guidelines for the order of authorship, be sure to verify you are using the correct ordering for both the conference and the department.

TIP: If you are putting more than one author, ask the other people before you put them on the abstract. Likewise, ask everyone involved with your project if they should be on the list of authors.

In the body of the abstract, **the background is the first section that reviewers make decisions about your work**. The background of the abstract answers the question, "why did this project occur". In two to three sentences maximum, set the introduction and explain the importance of the project. To increase your abstract's acceptance, this is the opportunity to make any linkages to conference theme.

TIP: The background should give enough information to briefly explain the purpose / importance of the project for any reviewer not formally trained in that particular field, but not so much that the background becomes the whole abstract.

TIP: Review conference guidelines to see if references are necessary. Most do not require them, so leave them out and use the words wisely.

The next section of the abstract is the methods. **As briefly as possible, explain how your study was conducted**. Be sure to include how the sample was gathered (i.e., convenience, random) and some demographic characteristics of the sample. Explain how you gathered your data (i.e., conducted a focus group, collected hair samples).

TIP: Spend more time in this section than in the background section. Many young professionals and students neglect this section because they may not be aware of the complete methodology or research design of the study. But be cautious here, most reviewers reduce abstract scores that do not explain the methods.

TIP: Use percentages and one variable of a pair in the demographic characteristics to save words. For example, "Among residents of the inner-city, 60% are males (n = 350)." The reviewer knows that females comprise 40% of residents (n = 233) without you stating it.

The results section is the number one section that causes many abstracts to be rejected. As succinctly as possible, explain what your findings were. Make sure to use the statistical analyses employed and whether the results were statistically significant or not. Only state the most important findings that would be relevant to the conference, its theme, and the attendees. If your abstract is based on practical applications, your results should include evaluation results (i.e., process, impact / outcome, number of people reached).

TIP: If you have not completed the study yet, do not state “results will be discussed”. Most reviewers will immediately reject an abstract when they read those words. Instead state the anticipated results, and reasons for the expectation of the findings.

TIP: Save words by using statistical short-hand – i.e., men who used aftershave were almost twice as likely to also use cologne as non-aftershave users ($p = 0.03$).

After completing the background, methods, and results, the last section in the body of the abstract is the conclusion. If you had not already made any linkages to the conference theme, you can do so now. In the conclusion the most important thing you can say is how your findings contribute to current knowledge; in other words, **explain the implications of the findings.**

Many conferences require learning objectives to accompany the abstract. Be sure to follow the guidelines of the conference for constructing learning objectives. This is not the time to say things that did not fit in the abstract, only write what is required for learning objectives. This is the last part of the abstract that can reduce your acceptance because programmers will select abstracts that complete the requirements of submission and complement their sessions. **If the learning objectives are not written correctly, the programmer would have to rewrite them** – creating more work for an already busy programmer.

TIP: Should be written from the perspective of what the participant will gain in knowledge or skill (measurable).

TIP: Must be linked to the work discussed in the abstract. Again, do not discuss anything that has not already been discussed.

Now that you have completed the abstract, here are some other tips to consider before submitting your abstract.

- Conference themes are important to the program planner, but if your abstract does not match the theme, go ahead and submit. There is still the possibility that it will be selected.
- When preparing your abstract, review abstracts from past conference events. This will allow you to see what type of abstracts was accepted and the format that was used. You can also see if your abstract is similar to previous presentations, permitting you to make your abstract unique.
- Structure, structure, structure. Follow some structure when developing your abstract – use headings within the abstract, if space allows. But make sure all parts of the abstract are present.
- **USE SPELL-CHECK!!!!** In this day with word-processing, it is unacceptable to have misspellings and typos. There is also no substitute for human eyes. Make sure to request someone not involved in the project to proofread the abstract. After checking for spelling and grammar, ask the reviewer to explain to you the study and its findings. If they can not explain it, rewrite it.
- Follow submission guidelines every step of the way. If there is a 250 word limit, only use 250 words. Make every word count – both when reaching the limit and when under the limit. If your abstract is at the word limit, reread the abstract to ensure every word is necessary and all sections of the study are discussed. Likewise if your abstract is considerably under the limit, reread to make sure all parts of the study are discussed in sufficient detail.

If you would like to get an insider’s look at the review process, **join the programming committee** of the conference. Most organizations have two calls during the year – one for committee members and one for abstract reviewers. You do not have to be experienced in programming or abstract reviewing to join, most committees welcome new members and will give adequate instruction to complete the reviews. In the end, you will gain experience and knowledge of which abstracts are champions and which are not – improving your chances of getting your abstract accepted in the future.

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