

Getting your abstract accepted

Conferences, symposia and other similar events normally invite abstract submissions. This is an excellent opportunity to showcase your work and share your findings, thoughts and ideas with others. Writing an abstract can be challenging. These handy top tips will help you in preparing and writing an abstract.

Tip 1 - Read the guidelines

All abstract submission systems will have some sort of guidance documents - read these first before writing your abstract. The guidelines will normally outline what is expected and sometimes include the judgement criteria against which your abstract will be reviewed. This will help you know what is expected and what to focus on.

Tip 2 - Critical friends

Find a critical friend. Choose a colleague who is not involved in your work but is perhaps familiar with your methodology or topic area and ask them to read your finished abstract. They are much more likely to ask questions and if they are asking, it is likely a reviewer would too. This will help you make sure your abstract is both relevant and reads well.

Tip 3 - Clarity on ethics

Often queries/concerns over whether a piece of work should have had ethical approval can be one of the reasons why abstracts get rejected. Make sure you follow the ethics guidance provided by the conference organiser. Be prepared to provide evidence of ethical approval or why ethics was not needed. Tools like this one are useful: <http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/>

Tip 4 - Use of Abbreviations

Think carefully about the use of abbreviations. Abbreviations are great for long or technical terms, however do not over use them. Overuse interrupts the flow of the 'story', especially if the reader needs to keep checking what the different abbreviations mean. Don't forget that when you do use abbreviations you must always write them out in full first.

Tip 5 - Selecting a Title

The title is the first thing the reader sees. It sets the tone of your abstract. Make it interesting. Your title lets the reader know exactly what your abstract is about so make sure it's an accurate description of the work for example if you are describing a feasibility study say so. That said, don't over describe it, keep it concise.

Tip 6 - Make it count

With all abstracts there's a word limit. It can be tempting to provide lots of information however there just isn't room for this. Make a list of the major points in each section you want to cover and start from there. Make each sentence count and if a word/sentence doesn't add anything to the information you are conveying, don't include it.

Tip 7 - Look at others

Some conferences publish the successful abstracts. Find out if the conference you are submitting to does this, and then if they do, have a look through them. They can give you ideas about what makes a successful abstract, expectations, style and content.

Tip 8 - Check again

Remember to always proof read your abstract for grammar and spelling. Better still, ask someone to proofread it prior to submission, they are more likely to pick up on mistakes than you are. Once submitted, abstracts usually cannot be amended, and if they are successful they may end up being published with those mistakes.

Tip 9 - Format

Some conferences will ask you what your preferences are for presenting your work should your abstract submission be accepted. Some work lends itself better to poster presentation and others to an oral presentation. When preparing your abstract, think about the pro and cons of each presentation method and decided what would be best for your work before choosing.

Tip 10 - And finally, give it a go!

The process of submitting is a great exercise, irrespective of the outcome. It is a great way to have your work published, disseminated and shared. If you are not successful this time any feedback you receive will help you hone your skills for the next time!

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Acknowledgments

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