



Australian
Library and
Information
Association

Writing a conference abstract

A conference program committee will usually “call for abstracts” up to twelve months before a conference. The program committee will assess the abstracts received and select those which:

- Reflect the conference themes
- Are pertinent and of interest to delegates i.e. stimulates discussion
- Demonstrate academic merit of research
- Have a high standard of writing

An abstract serves several purposes including to:

- Interest/intrigue the committee so they will select it
- Help define the topic for the conference/symposium
- Assist with the promotion of the conference/symposium and whet the appetites of potential delegates

Why do it? By writing an abstract you will:

- Share your experiences and knowledge with the rest of the profession
- Enhance your Curriculum Vitae
- Develop your writing and presentation skills
- Increase your professional profile
- Expand your professional network
- Increase the probability that your employer will financially support your conference attendance.
- Gain more industry knowledge by seeing other presentations
- Research, reflect on and explore ideas and issues to which you might not otherwise devote as much time

What to talk about

A good way to start is to think about:

- Something you do in your library with excellence or in a unique way
- A new technology that you are using
- An emerging trend or issue in library practice of which you have some experience
- An area of your work in which you would like to conduct some research e.g. selecting books for a particular segment of your client group
- An experience you have had such as working overseas or moving between industry segments
- 'Hot' topics on professional e-list
- Practical information you've needed but about which you haven't been able to find articles
- Personal/professional skills that enable you to make a unique contribution to the profession (many people enter the profession as a second career)

If you are still not sure try:

- Sharing some of your ideas with your colleagues over a cup of coffee
- Asking your supervisor/manager
- Looking at past abstracts/conference papers

Most importantly when choosing a topic pick one that you feel comfortable with, don't worry about being an expert.

Writing tips

Choose a title that encapsulates your idea.

The title of the paper is usually read as part of the abstract and should not be repeated in the abstract. It is useful for retrieval purposes to have some of your keywords in your title.

Your abstract might include:

- A statement of the problem that is going to be solved
- A description of why we should care about the problem
- The approach used to solve the problem
- The results or outcomes of your approach
- How the proposed paper fits in the conference theme

Each section is typically one or two sentence(s), include references only as necessary. Not all sections need to be included e.g. you may not have the results or outcomes. Look at past abstracts/conference papers to pick up the tone and style of that particular conference. Finish with a statement that will leave the audience thinking they must see

your presentation. How will the audience benefit from attending your session e.g. tips on how to do x, or inspiration to do y.

If you have more than one idea, you can always submit more than one abstract. You may submit the abstract before you commence researching and writing the paper. Be realistic about what you can achieve. For example, if your research methodology includes survey results, make sure you give yourself enough time to design, conduct and analyse the results of the survey.

Abstract Format

Conference websites generally contain style guides for authors. These may detail such things as:

- Maximum word count
- Font
- Associated information required (authors' names, contact details etc)
- Document type (Word, rich text etc)
- Submission method (upload document to speakers' portal, email etc)
- Deadline

Ensure that you understand and conform to requirements as the program committee may have hundreds of abstracts to consider. If you require more information, check the conference website for contact details for the conference program committee.

Final Checklist

- Does your abstract relate to the conference theme?
- Does your abstract conform to the conference style guidelines?
- Has someone else read your abstract?
- Have you checked with your manager/supervisor that it is ok to submit an abstract to this conference?
- Are keywords relevant to your topic embedded in the abstract?
- Have you included your name, position title and contact details, and those of your co-author(s)?
- Is it referenced appropriately (only include essential references for the abstract)?
- Have you submitted before the due date following the submission instructions on the conference website?

Still feeling nervous?

- Ask a colleague from your own or another institution to work with you as a co-author.
- Work with a client. This is especially effective in an academic or special library.

- Get a mentor – most people who have previously presented will be flattered to be asked. Who stands out in your mind as a good presenter? A mentor can help you formulate your ideas, comment on your abstract, and once you're selected, give you feedback on the paper and tips for your presentation.

Links

How to write an abstract workshop (<http://www.alia.org.au/groups/topend/abstract.html>)