

Getting Over the Fear: Finding conferences and writing abstracts

Wednesday 12th March, S1, 7 George Square, 13.00-14.30

Different types of conference

Conferences vary in both size, audience and theme.

- The large international conference
 - Usually a general or wide topic
 - Takes place over several days
 - Parallel sessions
 - Large number of delegates
 - May be organised by an association
 - Usually formal
 - *special case* MLA (many job interviews and professional business)
- Symposium/colloquium
 - Smaller in scope (fewer delegates)
 - Usually themed around an issue or specific topic
 - Aim is to discuss a topic or subject (emphasis on discussion and debate)
 - Is likely to take place over one or two days
 - More likely to be organised by a research group or number of interested academics
 - Less formal
- Postgraduate conferences

Finding Conferences

- Conference Alerts: <http://www.conferencealerts.com>
- Relevant listservs in your subject area (cfp.english.upenn.edu)
- Email alerts
- Posters/leaflets/word of mouth

Proposing a paper

- Note key topics, ideas, themes in the call for papers and consider the fit with your research
- A conference presentation will not summarise your entire thesis, but will focus on a distinct section with discrete boundaries
- Note deadlines and date of the conference
- Any restrictions? (e.g. PhD students only, or no students)
- Alternative formats (poster, roundtable, joint presentation)

Writing the abstract

- Give yourself time to write a few drafts
- Ask for proofreading by someone who has presented at conferences (ideally at the conference you are targeting)
- Submit on or before deadline (note time zones)

Title: Should be eye-catching and short but descriptive. Examples of titles of accepted abstracts: <http://www.film-philosophy.com/conference/index.php/conf/F-P2014/schedConf/presentations>

Aim of paper: What you want the paper to say. Include any question(s) or issues the paper will address.

Context and boundaries/limitations of your paper (cultural and/or disciplinary and/or political): The context also outlines why your paper is important.

Methodology: How you go about your research (methods) and key theoretical perspectives (theory) or key texts.

Main argument or line of enquiry: This is where you give your main findings or argument.

Conclusion: Summary, including any further questions or implications.

Evaluating Abstracts:

Conference abstracts are evaluated for their:

- Relevance (make sure your paper fits with the call for papers and be explicit about this. Refer to key ideas/research in the field and use key terminology *buzzwords*).
- Significance/Importance (be sure to emphasise why your work is important in the abstract)
- Coherence and Clarity (does the abstract make sense? Is it well written? Is the research question/problem/argument presented clearly? Has enough detail been provided? Am I clear about what this presentation will be?)

The 'Perfect' Abstract: A Model

A trendy, eye-catching title: which is brief but descriptive and contains some key terms

This first section is where I would set the scene, outlining what the argument/issue is and why it is important (and new and exciting). The section would begin with a snappy and attention-grabbing sentence. I would offer some context, moving from the general to the specific. I would outline how the area of research fits into a wider context and would indicate the relevance and importance of this research. I would include some questions or indicate the particular problem or issue the paper is addressing. I would outline precisely what the aim of the paper is, demonstrating clearly how it relates to the context I have given. I would ensure that I had referenced any citations accurately.

In the second section, I move into presenting my argument. I would give details of any key texts or theories I am using. I would ensure that I outline methods used in the analysis. It is important that every sentence of your abstract is relevant and contributes; using key terms and ideas from the call for papers is beneficial for enhancing the relevance of your abstract. This section will often follow the structure of the paper, indicating what I will do first, then second and finally how I will end the paper.

The third section will discuss the implications of the paper, outlining my conclusions based on the findings and argument of the second section. I should outline how my work fits within the wider context and tell the reader what is new and exciting about what I have discovered. I should indicate the value of the findings/argument and point to further research or questions.

Word count: 272