



Twelve tips to write an abstract for a conference: advice for young and experienced investigators

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As we have returned from the successful XXXIX Brazilian Thoracic Society Conference in Goiânia, Brazil—where more than 600 abstracts have been presented—and prepare for the American Thoracic Society International Conference deadline for submitting abstracts by November this year, we would like to emphasize the importance of presenting high-quality scientific abstracts at such conferences.

Presenting clinical research results in the form of abstracts in national and international meetings is common and expected among clinical researchers in academic and nonacademic settings, giving researchers the opportunity to present their work in person, network with researchers working in the same field, receive feedback from peers, and publish their results as abstracts in conference proceedings.

Writing abstracts that are clear and informative, following both the conference and internationally endorsed reporting guidelines, is very important for various reasons: abstracts are used by conference program committees to select the best suited ones for oral presentations; abstracts are usually available online prior to the conference and attendees can select which presentations they will attend; abstracts are usually published and, therefore, may be cited by other authors on their peer-reviewed publications; and finally, health care professionals may base medical decisions on results of studies that have been published only as a conference abstract. Therefore, in order to guide investigators how to write high quality conference abstracts, we have developed 12 tips for young and experienced investigators:

1. **Identify and carefully follow specific guidelines** suggested by the conference. Usually an abstract contains the following: title, background/introduction, objectives, methods, results, and conclusion; however, this format varies across conferences. Pay close attention to information such as word limit and how the abstract should be structured.
2. **Follow internationally endorsed reporting guidelines** specifically developed for conference abstracts. The **Enhancing the QUALity and Transparency Of health Research (EQUATOR)** Network is an international initiative that seeks to improve the quality of published health research globally by developing reporting guidelines for several types of study designs.⁽¹⁾ Many reporting guidelines have extensions focusing specifically on abstracts.⁽²⁾ Read them before starting to write your abstract.

3. **Think carefully about the title** because this is what readers look at first. Compose a clear, objective title and, whenever possible, include the study design. You can make it attractive, but avoid trying to be too clever (especially for beginners).
4. **Do not waste words on the introduction.** Be brief and straight to the point. Save space here, so you can provide more details in the methods and results sections, which are novel and particular to your study.
5. **Clearly state the objectives of the study.** The objective derives from your research question and should clearly align with results and conclusion.
6. **Make sure that the methods section is detailed enough**—but not too technical—and include the study design, setting, study participants, and eligibility criteria. You should also include a description of the important variables of the study, such as the exposure, intervention, predictors, and outcome, as well as the analytic approach used to answer the research question.
7. **Be precise and specific when writing the results.** Report the number of participants that were included the analysis, and, most importantly, always report the results that actually answer your research question (e.g., the difference between groups with a measure of precision such as an SD or 95% CI) and never just a p value.
8. **Be realistic in the conclusion.** Mention the impact of your study, but avoid speculating beyond what your results show; you can also mention future directions in the area of study, but avoid the overused “more studies are needed...”
9. **Perform a careful spell and language check,** especially if you are not writing in your native language.
10. **Avoid or minimize abbreviations.** Readers can feel frustrated when they have to go back to remember what an abbreviation stands for (e.g., EQUATOR in this paper).
11. **Get feedback** from your coauthors, mentor, and colleagues outside your team. The goal is to use their help to identify unclear sentences and missing or inaccurate information, as well as to make sure that the writing is high quality. They can also help you to make sure that the title, objectives, methods, results, and conclusion are all aligned with the research question.
12. **Do NOT wait until the last minute** to write and proofread the content. Writing and reviewing the abstract for quality always takes more time than you initially thought it would. Moreover, glitches in the submission process are always possible, so you want to give yourself time to contact the conference staff for help, if necessary.

REFERENCES

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