The art of the abstract

Guidance for aspiring presenters

A well-made abstract can serve many purposes. It's a short overview of your topic, it establishes your expertise and credibility – it's a sales pitch and it's a tool for helping you create and deliver a really rewarding conference session.

A conference abstract is a:

- proposal to the conference organisers
- summary of the content you will address in a conference session
- compelling invitation to attend
- promise to your audience
- plan (structure) you can build on

Your abstract should address the Six key elements of a conference abstract:

1. Context
2. Relevance
3. Focus
4. Method
5. Analysis
6. Learning outcomes

Three ways to make your proposed conference session stand out:

- Content structure

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Consider how you might use technology such as Zeetings or polling software to prompt feedback and interaction

- Session format

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Six key elements of a conference abstract

> **Pro tip!** Start by writing 50-100 words for each of the six elements in the table below. Show your draft to somebody else and ask them to highlight the word or phrase that stands out in each section. Use the highlighted portions as the basis of your abstract.

The finished abstract does not need to be long: one or two sentences for each of the six key elements should be enough.

	Write your first draft here *(up to 100 words for each section)*
How does your topic relate to the conference theme? *Is it relevant to a larger theme or debate in tertiary education management? What's the broader strategic or professional context for your topic?* *Why is this topic important to you, your peers or the higher ed sector?* *When you provide context, you contribute to the development of knowledge in your profession -- whether that's facilities management, finance, student services or whatever – and you demonstrate the value of looking beyond your own cubicle.*	**Context** start typing here
Why will this topic be of interest to other professional staff? *What will attract people to attend this conference session? What kinds of people or roles would benefit most?* *What new insight or unique feature are you offering?* *This is your main selling point -- for both the organising committee AND the people attending the conference*	**Relevance** start typing here
What is the particular question, issue or idea you intend to address in this session? *Specific, relevant to audience* *Here's an example of how you might refine this part of the abstract:* *First draft: Staff are offered several mechanisms and services to help with their worklife balance – very generalised, expressed passively*	**Focus** start typing here

	Write your first draft here *(up to 100 words for each section)*
Second draft: 23% of staff utilise salary sacrifice to gain extra leave – a statement of fact, rather than a question or idea *Third draft: does the "salary sacrifice for extra leave" program help staff to balance their work and home/family commitments?*	
Establish your credentials as somebody with expertise to share on this topic *Have you done research into this topic? Was it real-world, hands-on research? A literature review? Meta-analysis of existing data?* *Are you presenting a case study? Are there other examples of similar cases in higher education or other industries?* *What other steps have you taken to explore, investigate and test your ideas?*	**Method** start typing here
A succinct statement of your conclusions *What did you learn from your investigations or experiences?* *What has changed as a result?* *What should (or could) happen next?*	**Analysis** start typing here
What will your audience learn by attending this session? *Are there specific actions or ideas I could take away and use?* *Can you provide templates, extra reading or other guidance?*	**Learning outcomes** start typing here

Content structure

Helps the audience to understand your purpose, interpret the content, and make connections

Presentation:

- Rhetorical question
- List (five things I wish I'd know before starting Project X)
- Mock debate (where you present multiple views of a contentious idea)
- Detective puzzle

Interactive with audience participation:

- Quiz
- Interview or Q&A
- Flipped
- Action learning

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Session format

Ideas forum:

- panel discussion
- point-counterpoint debate with several participants
- group brainstorming

"Hot topic" informal discussion in a lounge area

Hands-on workshop with a tangible outcome

Interview or fireside chat

Roundtable discussion for a community of practice, eg finance managers

Demonstration of a technique

Debate, with voting

Skills development – e.g. teach participants how to design a visual management board, or practice the basics of visual note-taking, or do a root cause analysis using the "5 whys" technique

A game with a relevant purpose, e.g. a themed Escape Room to explore group problem-solving tactics

Game or playful activity, improv theatre

Tell me something I don't know (QI-style game show)

e-display:

- 3 Minute Thesis

- Video (up to 3 minutes): screen capture, talking heads, animation

- Sketch a storyboard or infographic

- Record a song, a poem, an interpretive dance. . .