CPH Office of Scientific Writing
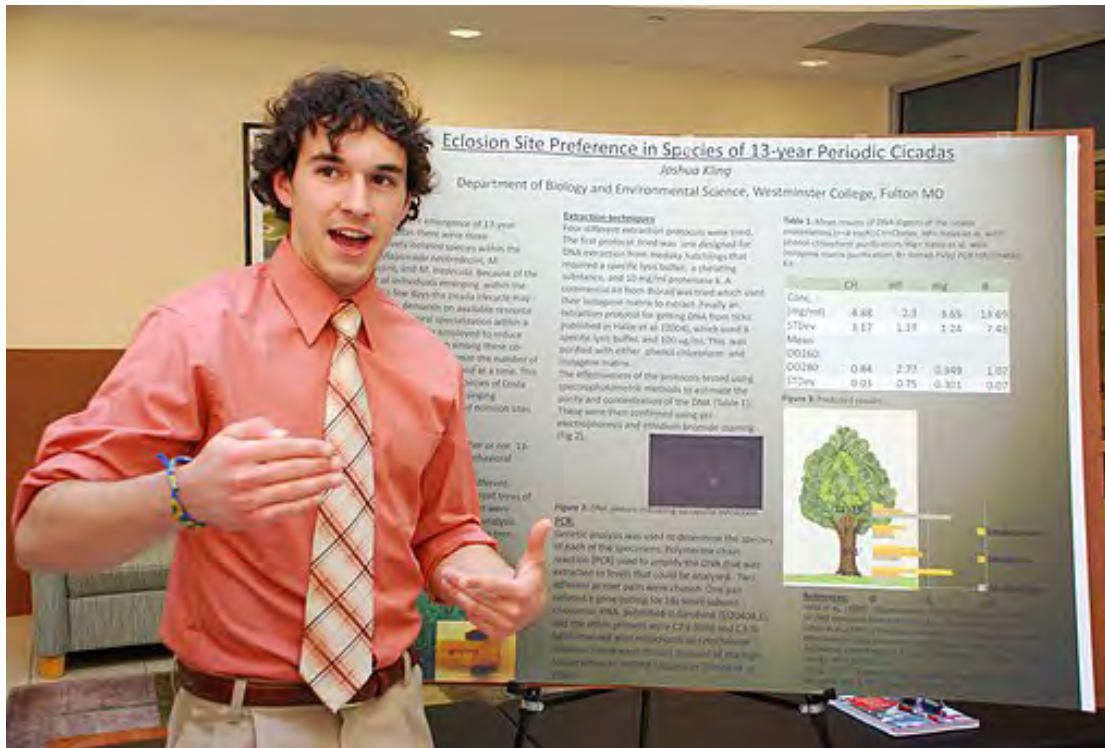
Writing Effective Conference Abstracts

Steve Claas
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University of Kentucky

Abstract

Abstract: a summary of the contents of a book, article, or formal speech.

Conference abstract: a summary of a scientific study or other work that serves as a *proposal or application* to deliver an oral or poster presentation at a conference.

Article Abstract vs Conference Abstract

- Have different purposes

- Written at different stages

- Structurally similar

Before Writing

Research the conference & its sessions

- Is there a good fit between the conference and your research/work?

- Is there a particular session that seems suited to your research/work?

- Are the types of studies (or other work) presented similar to yours?

- What do others (e.g., mentors) know about the conference?

Before Writing

Research the submission requirements

- Deadline
- Word count (page count, character count, line count)
- Other formal considerations (font, font size, single/double space, justification, margins, whether references are expected/allowed, file format)
- Type of abstract (structured, unstructured)
- Mode of submission
- Title
- Keywords
- Co-author information (who, preferred name, affiliation)

Structured vs Unstructured Abstracts

Background

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Methods

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Results

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Conclusions

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Research Study Abstracts

Your abstract should persuade your audience that . . .

Background

- Your research attempts to better understand or solve a critical problem.
- You have formulated a specific research question, hypothesis, or knowledge gap. Your study has a well defined, clear purpose.

Methods

- You have designed a study and employed methods (population/data set, analyses, etc) that are capable of answering your question or testing your hypothesis.

Results

- You have learned something that, at least in part, answers your question or supports (or refutes) your hypothesis.

Conclusions

- [Sometimes] Your findings have a specific relationship to findings of previous research.
- What you have learned has value for somebody—researchers, clinicians, public health professionals, a particular population, etc. (i.e., answer the "So what?" question)

Example: Structured Research Study Abstract

Background: Coal dust is a major risk factor for the occupational health of coal miners, and underground workers with coal mine dust lung disease (CMDLD) may have a higher risk of developing nodular thyroid disease (NTD). The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between coal mine dust lung disease and the development of nodular thyroid disease in coal miners.

Zhao F, et al. *Front Public Health*. 2022 Oct 28;10:1005721.

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Results: Age, coal mine dust lung disease (CMDLD), red blood cells (RBC), mean red blood cell volume (MCV), albumin (ALB), albumin/globulin (A/G), indirect bilirubin (IBIL), globulin (GLOB), total bilirubin (TBil) and myeloperoxidase (MPO) were associated with the development of nodular thyroid disease in coal miners ($p < 0.05$) The results of univariate and multifactorial logistic regression analysis showed that CMDLD (OR:4.5,95%CI:2.79-7.51) had the highest OR and CMDLD was the strongest independent risk exposure factor for the development of nodular thyroid disease in coal miners.

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Conclusions: There is a strong correlation between coal mine dust lung disease and nodular thyroid disease in underground coal miners, and clinicians need to be highly aware of the high risk of NTD in coal miners with CMDLD and adopt individualized clinical prevention strategies.

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Public Health Practice Abstract

Your abstract should persuade your audience that . . .
- You have identified an important public health problem, a consequential lack of knowledge, or a critical shortcoming in health care/public health practice. Your work has a well defined, clear purpose.
- You have designed and applied an intervention to either mitigate the problem, educate a population, or ameliorate the shortcoming.
- Your intervention had some assessable effect.
- The effect of your intervention had value in mitigating the problem, educating a population, or ameliorating the shortcoming, and/or it taught you something about how the intervention might be improved.

Example: Unstructured PH Practice Abstract

People experiencing homelessness (PEH) have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, yet their vaccination coverage is lower than is that of the general population. We implemented a COVID-19 vaccination program that used evidence-based and culturally tailored approaches to promote vaccine uptake and equity for PEH in Los Angeles County, California. From February 2021 through February 2022, 33 977 doses of vaccine were administered at 2658 clinics, and 9275 PEH were fully vaccinated. This program may serve as a model for future service delivery in vulnerable populations.

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Rosen AD, et al. Am J Public Health. 2023;113(2):170-174

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No Results: What to Do?

- Try to get *something* to include as a finding, e.g., "Table 1" descriptive data.
- Write a "descriptive abstract."
- The first three persuasive acts can be executed.
- *Do not in any way include what you hope or expect to find.*
- With no findings or conclusions, provide more detail on methods.
- Unless you have high confidence that you can complete the work before the conference, don't submit. (*PH Showcase is an exception!*)
- If it is a student-centric conference, roll the dice with a descriptive abstract. If it is a high-powered academic conference, consider looking for another to apply to *after* you have some preliminary findings.

Example: Abstract Without Results

Practitioners in health departments, university extension programs, and nonprofit organizations working in public health face varied challenges to publishing in the peer-reviewed literature. These practitioners may lack time, support, skills, and efficacy needed for manuscript submission, which keeps them from sharing their wisdom and experience-based evidence. This exclusion can contribute to literature gaps, a failure of evidence-based practice to inform future research, reduced ability to educate partners, and delays in advancing public health practice. Our article describes the writing workshops offered to Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity (DNPAO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funded programs in 2021. This project consisted of three 60-minute introductory writing webinars open to all recipients, followed by a Writing for Publications workshop, an 8- to 9-week virtual learning/writing intensive for selected writing team applicants. The Society for Public Health Education staff, consultants, and CDC/DNPAO staff developed, refined, and presented the curriculum. The workshop for public health practitioner writing teams was offered to two cohorts and included extensive coaching and focused on potential submission to a Health Promotion Practice supplement, "Reducing Chronic Disease through Physical Activity and Nutrition: Public Health Practice in the Field" (see Supplemental Material), which was supported by CDC/DNPAO. We describe the webinars, the workshop design, modifications, evaluation methods and results.

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Lavinghouze SR, et al. 2022 Nov;23(1_suppl):21S-33S.

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A Few Other Things to Remember

- Keep your audience in mind.
- Be careful how you articulate your purpose statement: don't imply that you know the result.
- Don't over-reach when you are arguing for the impact/significance of your research.
- Make it clean, correct, appropriate for an academic audience.
- Make the title concise and informative.
- Choose keywords with care.

Public Health Showcase

Primary Research

Structured abstracts should include background, methods, results, and conclusions sections. The abstract should be no more than 250 words, excluding the title and the author names.

Practice, Education, Workforce Development

Unstructured abstracts should be in paragraph form (up to 250 words) summarizing the content and objectives of the presentation.

https://cph.uky.edu/events/2023-public-health-showcase

Send questions to Doris Castellanos
doris.castellanos@uky.edu

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Give It a Whirl!

- **If you have an ongoing research or PH project, write about that.**
- **If you don't:**
  - Pedestrian accident data from Rhode Island Hospital registry
  - Admitted January 1, 2017 - December 31, 2020
  - 516 patients
  - Population data from American Community Survey 2019 5-Year census
  - age >18 yr
  - ≤50 yr, pedestrian accident rate, 50.0 per 100,000 people
  - >50 yr, pedestrian accident rate, 75.5 per 100,000 people
  - ≤50 yr, mortality rate, 7.6%
  - >50 yr, mortality rate, 14.9%

Research Abstract
- Critical problem
- Research question, hypothesis, or knowledge gap
- Your purpose
- Your methods
- What you learned
- What you learned has value for somebody

PH Practice Abstract
- Important PH problem, lack of knowledge, shortcoming in PH practice
- Your purpose
- Your intervention/effort
- Effect of your intervention/effort
- Your intervention or what you learned about your intervention has value for somebody

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