

The 10th National Mediation Conference
***New Frontiers; Celebrating the Past, Embracing the Present and Creating
the Future***

Adelaide Convention Centre
7-9 September 2010

HOW TO WRITE AN INVITING ABSTRACT

Introduction

The single most important thing about an Abstract is that it is a short document [300 words] that is intended to capture the interest of a potential member of your audience. Thus in a very important sense it is a marketing document for your full presentation/paper. The Abstract therefore needs to be well written and raise curiosity and show that it will deliver some answers so it will encourage a potential audience member to attend. State the relevance of your ideas to past work or to the future development of the field.

Thus the first rule of Abstract writing is that it should engage the reader by telling him or her what your presentation is about and why they should attend. Although strictly not part of your Abstract, the title of the proposed paper is most important. Short attention-catching titles which clearly indicate the topic of your paper/workshop are the most effective.

With regards the body of the Abstract you need to make a clear statement of the topic of your paper and provide 2 - 4 open questions that you are answering. Next you need to say how your research was/is being undertaken. For example, is it empirical or theoretical? Is it quantitative or qualitative? Perhaps it follows the critical research method. What value are your findings and to whom will they be of use?

The Abstract should then briefly describe the work to be discussed in your paper and also give a concise summary of the findings. Finally your Abstract should not include diagrams and references are not required in the Abstract.

Section 1

Title: Although strictly not part of your Abstract, the title of the proposed paper is most important. Short attention-catching titles which clearly indicate the topic of your paper/workshop are the most effective.

Section 2

The main focus of the first paragraph is a general statement about an issue in the field that your presentation/workshop contributes to. Introduce your study by identifying the part of the field ie the context that you're speaking to, and raise the issue that you'll be addressing. Advise if your paper is a development of a paper previously presented at a previous NMC. Advise how, if at all, it's connected with accreditation. Abstracts do not need to be linked to accreditation.

This sets the stage for you to present your research as the solution to a set of open questions, or as a challenge to a claim made by another scholar. Frame the issue as a puzzle or problem or gap or weakness in the literature. This shows why your work is important. Make clear what your application adds to knowledge.

Alternatively, you can open with one sentence stating what the paper is about and then contextualize it with a general statement about how it connects to an issue in the field, but the first way is a bit more elegant.

Section 3

This should be the heart of the abstract. State here that your research/presentation/workshop offers a solution to the problem described in section 2 and how. Briefly give details about the research/presentation/workshop then summarize your findings. You should in any event include a detailed description of any results: specify your findings in detail and introduce key terms you use in the analysis. Avoid saying in effect "a solution to this problem will be presented." If you are taking a stand on a controversial issue, summarize the arguments that lead you to your position.

Section 4

You now need to return the big picture: How do these findings address the issue raised in Section 2? How do your findings 'transform the landscape'? What does this imply for mediation: practitioners? clients? others? This discussion need not be lengthy, but it should convincingly convey that your research has significant implications.

Section 5

Finish with a statement that 'whets the appetite' .

Checklist: have you

1. Chosen a title that clearly indicates the topic of the paper and is not more than one typed line?
2. Identified the potential audience?
3. Stated the problem or research question as open questions?
4. Stated the main point or argument of the proposed presentation?
5. Explained abbreviations at their first occurrence?
6. For research papers:
 1. reported what results you've already obtained in sufficient detail that your abstract may be evaluated.
 2. indicated explicitly the nature of the experimental design and the specific hypothesis tested.
7. Stated the relevance of your ideas to past work and/or to the future development of the field.
8. Described analyses in as much detail as possible.
9. Stated the contribution to mediation research made by the analysis.