

How to Write a Conference/Paper Abstract

Main Objectives of the Abstract

- Introduce your main thesis
- Provide an overview of your paper
- Situate your paper within a literary tradition and theoretical scope (can be light on theory, but must have a theoretical approach)
- Provide a short and informative view of your paper (keep it concise)
- Persuade the committee to accept your paper (use the rhetoric of persuasion. Be confident and assertive)

What Abstracts do **NOT** include

- Direct quotes
- Plot summary (unless it is a general conference, then 1-2 concise sentences should suffice)
- Jargon language
- Informal (disrespectful) language
- Secondary sources
- Bibliography

Five Key Elements of Inclusion

- 1) Working Paper Title
- 2) Context or background thesis
- 3) Scope / methodological approach
- 4) Specific examples/Purpose of examples
- 5) Conclusion

1) Paper Title

- Make it succinct with correct spelling
 - It should be the last thing you spell check b/c it is the first thing the committee sees
- Make it one line (long paper titles = boring and verbose)
- Make certain it's catchy (but not too jargony, overly pop, or unprofessional)
- Mention the author and/or book/poem you are analyzing
 - include the author's first and last name
- You can use colons but do not overdo it

2) Context/Background

- A. Why are you writing this? Briefly justify why you want to explore this title
- B. Background – what is your main idea?
- C. Explicitly state your (working) thesis
 - a. Provide 1-3 sentences. Do not skimp!

3) Scope/Methodological Approach

- A. Where do you focus your ideas?

- Parameters: historical, methodological, postmodern, visual studies, feminist, cultural, etc.
- B. What is your approach in this piece?
 - Theory, literary, etc.
 - Nota Bene: Define your terms. Ex: “Feminist approach under Judith Butler’s ___ theory.”

4) Specific Examples / Examples Purpose

- A. Examples: What are your specific examples which support your thesis?
 - no more than one sentence per example
- B. Examples purpose: How do your examples support / elaborate your thesis?
 - no more than one sentence per example
- C. Double check examples: Are they the best ones to illustrate your argument? Don’t include everything...choose the best ones

5) Conclusion

- A. State the implications or significance of your findings and analysis
 - Among the types of questions that a conclusion addresses are:
 - What will you prove and/or illustrate? And to what end?
 - What is relevant about your work?
 - What is your contribution to scholarship? (a small nugget that sheds light/offers a new perspective)

Things to Remember:

- Read the CFP carefully & repetitively!
 - Committees have several proposals to read through and request specific formats and guidelines for a reason. Submitting without attention to the following details can be an instant rejection of your proposal.
- Stay within the word count limit!
- Follow required style & format
- Conform to the guidelines provided (single or double spaced, CV as separate document, etc.)
- Include name, date, school affiliation, email address, and a phone number
- Include author(s) & primary work(s)
- List AV needs

Adapted from Dr. Nhora Serrano’s “How to Write an Abstract” presentation, Nov. 6, 2013.