

Writing a Poster Abstract: Guidelines for Success

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Writing an abstract may seem like a daunting task especially for the novice. Many authors struggle with this task, although it is an important first step for a poster, a presentation, or an article. This article aims to give the abstract writer guidelines for submitting an abstract with the intent of aiding the writer to submit a successful abstract. While these guidelines are focused toward a PENS poster abstract, the concepts can be transferred to other abstract submissions.

Purpose of the Abstract

The abstract serves three major functions. First, it enables the review committee (PENS Research Committee) to determine the relevance, as well as the quality of the presentation planned. Second, it allows the Conference Planning Committee to organize into themes. Third, the abstract serves to provide information to conference attendees regarding poster presentations when choosing which posters to view (Happell, 2008). The abstract is a glimpse of what is yet to come, as well as a summary of what will be included in the poster presentation. It is not merely an introduction to the presentation, but rather showcases what is contained within the presentation (Watson, 2006). A poorly written abstract may be indicative of a poorly constructed poster, whereas a well-written abstract usually is representative of a well-designed poster.

Review the Abstract Guidelines for Submission

Before submitting an abstract, review the guidelines for submission and formulate a firm idea about the content of the abstract and ultimately, the poster. Ideas can be generated from research projects, evidence-based practice projects, clinical projects, as well as interesting or unusual cases that are encountered in clinical practice. Additionally, informational posters can be presented to showcase information that is not related to a research project or case presentation. The most common reason for an abstract to be rejected is not adhering to the abstract submission requirements.

Review the abstract guidelines on the PENS website and determine which category is most appropriate for the abstract idea. (PENS Research Committee reserves the right to assign the poster to a different category if it is more appropriate for a different category, based on the information submitted in the abstract.) Note that each category of poster abstract has a slightly different

formatting requirement. The abstract formatting is designed to model the poster headings. PENS abstracts are submitted electronically via the PENS website. Pay attention to the abstract due date, as late submissions are a cause for abstract rejection.

Common Errors in Abstract Writing

A common error when writing an abstract is waiting until the last minute to prepare the abstract. Many of the other common errors can be eliminated if one plans enough time in the process. It allows you to review, ask for feedback and revise before submitting your abstract.

Another common error in abstract writing is length of submission. Pay attention to the word limit in the abstract instructions. Abstracts that contain only one or two sentences do not adequately convey what is proposed for the presentation. Conversely, abstracts that are lengthy make evaluation difficult as the reviewers may need to read through unnecessary information to determine what is actually proposed for the presentation. Adherence to suggested headings make the review process simpler, as well as guides the abstract writer to include required information.

Other errors are grammatical, spelling and typographical. A poor writing style may convey lack of organization or carelessness to the review committee. When abstracts are written hurriedly, the writer may omit checking for errors. The Research Committee is available to mentor PENS members in abstract writing.

While writing an abstract may seem like a daunting task, advance preparation and careful attention to the guidelines can make this process successful. Guidance from an experienced colleague is a valuable resource for the novice writer/presenter.

References

- Happell, B. (2008). Conference presentations: A guide for writing the abstract. *Nurse Researcher*, 15(4), 79-87.
- Watson, R. (2006). Writing an abstract. *Nurse Author & Editor* (Blackwell), 16(4).

Other Resources

- Foote, J. M. (2010). Creating an effective poster presentation. *PENS Reporter*, 22(6), 3-4. Retrieved from <http://pens.org>
- Happell, B. (2007). Hitting the target! A no tears approach to writing an abstract for a conference presentation. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 16, 447-452. Doi:10.1111/j.1447-039.2007.00501.x