

# Tips and Tricks for Writing a Good Conference Presentation Abstract



## What is a conference abstract?

An abstract provides a summary of the presentation that will be given during the conference. It should be concise, clear, and informative and written in correct English. Ideally, have it read by a native speaker.

## How long should it be?

In most cases, a word or character limit is given by the organizer. It is expected to be short, for example 1500 – 2500 characters (with spaces), or 300 words. Never go over the limit, yet try to reach at least 70% this word limit for it not to be too short.

## How do I choose a title?

The title and/or subtitle should give a clear picture of what will be discussed (neither too metaphoric nor too long). A catchy, perhaps less explicit, title can be a good way to capture your audience, but it should always be followed by a more descriptive subtitle. Here are some examples:

- *Let's Talk Terminology: (How) Do Concepts of 'Reuse' Apply to Ancient Egyptian Papyri?*
- *Reading the Unreadable: Digital Tools to Help with Epigraphic Challenges*

A single title is enough if it remains simple and descriptive, for example:

- *Recent Findings from the Old Kingdom Necropolis at Abu Rawash*
- *The Career of Harkhuf Revisited*

## How do I structure my abstract and what should go in it?

### 1) Introducing the topic

The first one or two sentences of the text should introduce the topic. This is often done by referring to a debated subject in the field, or simply the material you present. You can also mention the institutional framing of the paper here if it is particularly relevant (preliminary findings from PhD, excavation, part of a research cluster, etc.). It can also already contain the main research question of the paper.

### 2) Elaborating on the project

About three to eight sentences should contain:

**a) the current state of research:** refer to previous research on the same topic/material, and provide an overview of what is currently known about it. You can give the most important bibliographical references, if strictly necessary, but keep it short.

**b) the motivation/necessity of the research:** Why/how is the current research situation lacking? Why is your new research necessary or relevant? How does it fill the gap in previous research (providing new questions/answers, correct previous misconceptions, add new data, create/elaborate on theories, etc.).

**c) the material on which the research is based:** give a concise description of the corpus you are using and define it temporally and spatially, for example:

- *The Deir el-Medina Hieratic Papyri Dated to the Reign of Ramses XI Kept in the Museo Egizio in Turin*
- *The Ceramic Finds of the 5th Work Season of the Excavations of Basel University in the Valley of the Kings*

**d) the methods and theoretical framework:** explain how you plan to conduct your research and answer the research question. This could be by applying/discussing a new theoretical concept, collecting new data, using already existing data in a new way, comparing different data sets, applying new instruments or tools, quantitative and qualitative approaches, etc.

### 3) Concluding (optional)

A concluding sentence can be useful to sum up what you intend to discuss by posing your main research question, to highlight the relevance of your research, and make your audience interested in the talk. You can either already give away the gist of your talk or keep it on a cliff hanger, for example:

- *Concluding, it is argued that a change in the approach to these ancient manuscripts reveals entirely new aspects of the social role of such objects, and the intellectual background for their creation, of which some will be illustrated in this paper.*
- *By taking these sources into account, this paper will demonstrate that Heliopolis was still a flourishing religious centre during the Third Intermediate Period, in contrast to the common conception that it had been on the decline since the late New Kingdom.*

### **Other tips**

- In cases where there is a double-blind peer-reviewing system, do not put any personal, identifying details in the abstract text itself (e.g. where you studied or the institution you are affiliated with) since the process should be anonymous.
- If you are asked for keywords, give roughly between 2 or 5 (not just one).
- Always write concisely, and avoid using convoluted expressions – your reviewer will thank you for it.
- Sometimes it is useful to ask someone not familiar with your research to read through your abstract, this way you know it is understandable and clear.
- If you have time, write the abstract early, let it rest for a few days, and come back to review it.
- Resist the temptation to save all your exciting conclusions for the presentation. No one will hear your talk if the abstract is rejected for being too vague!
- Consider that if you list the presentations you have given on your CV (as you should as an early career scholar), the title of your talk will be visible there for some time, so make sure to think about a good title.

**Remember:** This is a guide to help you get started on writing an abstract, but it is not comprehensive! Sometimes the tips here will not fit with your own material or approach, and this is not a problem. But if there is one thing to take away: an abstract should always be clear, concise, and well-written.