British Association of Perinatal Medicine

"How to" Guide

How to write an abstract

Well done for thinking about submitting a conference abstract. This is a great way to share your research with others.

There are plenty of ways to maximise your chances of your abstract being successful. This guide uses the BAPM Annual Conference and Scientific Meeting abstract submission criteria as an example but whatever event you are applying for make sure you follow the instructions given by the conference organisers. If you don't, there is a risk that your abstract may be deemed ineligible.

Some general tips:

Less is More - Stick to the word count – at the BAPM meeting we limit abstracts to 300 words. Often it's useful to write a longer initial draft and then edit the abstract to the correct word count. It is OK to use abbreviations, but you must always write them out in full once. Bullet points and short sentences may be helpful.

Make it easy for reviewers - use an easy to read font in the recommended type size, and always proof read your abstract before final submission.

Stuff to leave out - you must not use generic names, include any patient identifiable information or endorse products of any description.

Title:

Your title must reflect the topic/message of your study; short and snappy is more likely to attract the viewer's attention (generally 10 – 15 words, or less).

Background/introduction:

- What is already known about your subject (i.e. have you checked the literature?) and is your information interesting and potentially useful to others?
- Think about quality improvement (QI), rather than simply audit – include QI methodology and consider whether you can include demonstration of sustained change.
- If you are reporting an audit of local practice, what are the learning points for a wider audience?
- With regard to a case report, what makes it interesting enough to be accepted? For example, an uncommon complication of a relatively common condition may be of greater interest than description of a very rare condition.
- The background should be brief and relevant to the rest of the abstract, with a maximum of 1-2 references. References are not strictly necessary.

Aim:

- This must be **SMART** – **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-limited
- ***Exactly*** what is your research/audit question?
- Think hard – if you have not defined the question, it is difficult to present an answer. Make sure your study does actually address the question.

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Protocol/methods:

- What did you actually do? This bit is also very important! You must define very clearly which patients you investigated, and how you did this.
- The methods section should be clear enough that another investigator could replicate your study. What type of study was it (retrospective v prospective, case-control, etc.); how did you find your data; how did you select how many subjects to study?

Results:

Here we encourage you to ***NURTURE*** your thoughts. The Results section should be considered the "meat" of the abstract; if results are not included, your abstract will not be considered.

Numbers – numbers/data are key to any scientific project or audit. Consider carefully how much data you present – we suggest only those data which are strictly relevant. Think about how you present the data; e.g. a common mistake is to use mean values when data are skewed.
Understandable – the reader must be able to understand the data that you are presenting; keep them clear and concise.
Repeatable – you must give enough information such that your study/audit is potentially repeatable.
t-tests & other stats – good statistics are generally very simple – think particularly about whether your data are normally distributed, and what the statistics will tell the reader. Gestation, birth weight and Apgar scores are almost always non-parametric. Don't overanalyse and remember that if you don't understand your statistics, the reader certainly won't!
Unique – which bit of your results is new? This should be the focus of your results section, commonly the last bit to be presented.
Representative – you should present enough data that the reader can decide if the results are relevant to their own patients.
English – this is important and commonly underestimated. Good grammar, with no typographical errors, makes for much easier reading, and is likely to sway the markers towards being more generous. Data are always plural! Get someone to proof read it for you.

Message/conclusions:

- Think about what the reader will learn from your abstract
- Be as short and punchy as you can – the message from your abstract should be able to be presented in one sentence.
- Only include in the conclusion what you can conclude from ***your*** data
- Do not repeat information given in the Introduction

Good luck!