

How to write a successful conference abstract: a practical guide and a few tips

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Writing an abstract for a conference may seem a complex task, especially for beginners or those lacking specific academic training or experience. However, with a clear and structured approach, it is possible to create an effective abstract that captures the scientific committee's and conference participants' attention. The abstract serves as the "showcase" of a scientific study, a kind of business card that introduces readers to the study's content and stimulates their initial interest. A well-written abstract provides a clear and accurate summary of the work and highlights the study's importance, attracting potential collaborators and sparking scientific discussion.^{1,2} Presenting research findings at conferences is not only an opportunity to share knowledge but also represents a significant recognition of the nursing profession in defining and enhancing its professional context. Disseminating the results of clinical studies and projects helps to consolidate the role of nurses as professionals engaged in research and innovation, improving healthcare quality, advancing the discipline, and becoming key references in specific clinical, educational, and organizational areas. In this editorial, we provide a practical guide for writing an abstract, highlighting key elements to include and offering practical tips to improve structure and content quality. The goal is to present research clearly and convincingly and to actively contribute to the sharing of experiences and the growth of the nursing community.

A well-structured abstract must answer four fundamental questions.

What is the research problem or question?

The first section of an abstract, perhaps the most important, should introduce and contextualize the problem and the necessity of the study. It is essential to concisely and clearly describe the addressed issue, emphasizing its relevance in the clinical, educational, or organizational context. Demonstrating how the issue is current and significant and how the study can fill a gap in existing literature or improve clinical practices is crucial. A well-defined problem helps establish the direction of the study and engages the reader.

How was the issue addressed?

This section should describe the methodological approach used to answer the research question. Key details on the study design (e.g., observational, experimental, qualitative, or quantitative), inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants, data collection tools, and analysis techniques should be provided. This section should be clear and concise, offering the reader a precise idea of how the study was conducted without excessive technical details.

What are the main results?

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This section should present a summary of the main findings, highlighting the most relevant data with references to statistical indicators where applicable (e.g., p-values, confidence intervals, means). It is important to present the results clearly and orderly, allowing readers to understand the study's impact without unnecessary information. Focus should be placed on the most significant outcomes that directly address the research question.

What is the significance of the results?

The final part of the abstract should provide an interpretation of the findings in light of clinical practice or the study's context. What are the implications of the obtained data? How can they influence nursing practice or suggest future research developments? It is also essential to highlight the study's strengths and recognize any limitations that may have influenced the results. This section aims to generalize the study's findings and provide an overview of its contribution to the field.

The IMRAD format

Just like a scientific article, an abstract should be divided into key sections, following the IMRAD structure (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion/Conclusions).³ This structure helps both the writer and the reader follow a logical flow (Table 1).

A general guideline for the length of different sections is as follows: Introduction 25% (two sentences), Methods 25% (two sentences), Results 35% (three sentences), Discussion/Conclusion 15% (one or two sentences).¹ What if the conference or journal guidelines require an "unstructured" abstract? Just follow the IMRAD format anyway and then remove the section headings.

Key words

Typically, the submission of an abstract requires the inclusion of a few keywords, usually between three and ten. Keywords represent the relevant and recurring terms related to the research being presented and should be closely related to the abstract. An effective tip is to incorporate keywords within the text itself. If the work

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Key words: Abstract, scientific communication, congresses, nursing research, academic writing

is presented in English, using MeSH (Medical Subject Headings) terms from the PubMed database is a good strategy to facilitate the indexing of your abstract and increase its visibility in future bibliographic searches.

And the title?

If the abstract is a summary of a broader study, structured to synthesize key findings and present them in a way that encourages a reader or reviewer to invest time and attention in the work, we can say that the title is “the abstract of the abstract.” A winning title should be short and direct, ideally within 10-15 words, clearly conveying the research problem and/or objective along with the study design⁴ (e.g., “The ICU experience during the COVID-19 pandemic by ICU nurses: A phenomenological study”⁵).

Practical tips

In addition to the general guidelines mentioned earlier, here are some additional suggestions that may be helpful.⁶ An abstract should be concise and direct, without digressions; it must maintain logical consistency across sections, avoiding discrepancies between the objective, methods, and results presented. Pay attention to the appropriate use of language and terminology, avoiding overly complex technical terms unless strictly necessary, and briefly explaining concepts that may not be familiar to all readers. Conversely, overly informal language can reduce the visibility of research work. Avoid excessive abbreviations; if necessary, introduce abbreviations the first time they are mentioned, and then use them consistently throughout the text.

Each word should be carefully chosen to convey the message as effectively as possible. Complex language, and lengthy sentences filled with clauses may make a statement clear to the writer but incomprehensible to readers. The number of words available is not unlimited; most conferences or journals impose strict word limits, typically between 250-300 words. Adopting the “short & brisk” English writing style, focusing on expressing a single concept per sentence, can be very useful.⁷

Involving colleagues to provide a second or even a third opinion can help identify areas for improvement and ensure greater clarity and readability.

Finally, do not rush. While the abstract is the first part of a scientific article that readers see, it should be the last section written,

once the entire study is well-defined and completed. However, the approach differs slightly when preparing an abstract for a conference, where submission deadlines are often tight, and the actual presentation, whether a talk or a poster, is scheduled months later. In such cases, having a clear idea from the beginning and structuring the abstract coherently with the project to be presented is essential.

Common mistakes to avoid

When writing an abstract, it is easy to make mistakes that can compromise its effectiveness. The most common errors are related to information balance, being too vague or overloading the text with data. An abstract should provide concrete details and essential numerical results from the research, avoiding generic statements that do not add value. On the other hand, too many technical details can make the abstract difficult to read and understand, distracting from the key points, which should be the main message. Presenting too much secondary information can overshadow the most important results and diminish the impact of the abstract.

Be careful when proofreading your work. Grammatical or typographical errors can undermine the credibility of the work and should be carefully avoided. Take your time and submit the abstract only when you are sure it has been thoroughly revised and corrected, preferably multiple times and by multiple reviewers.

The abstract must also comply with each conference’s specific guidelines and rules (maximum word count, formatting, style), which can vary. Pay attention when reusing an abstract previously submitted to another event or journal (*i.e.*, “copy and paste”), as differences in word limits or structure requirements may lead to non-compliance, potentially resulting in the rejection of your submission.

Conclusions

Writing an abstract for a conference or an article is a skill that improves with practice. Contributing quality submissions to conferences represents an important opportunity for professional growth and networking, allowing nurses to enhance their role within public health and clinical care. Moreover, sharing experiences and research data can contribute to the development of new protocols and the improvement of healthcare practices. The information provided in this editorial may serve as valuable support to enhance

Table 1. Example of an abstract with IMRAD structure.

IMRAD structure	Example*
Introduction The introduction should provide a clear and concise context of the topic addressed. In a few lines, it is necessary to explain the problem and the objective of the study or project. Avoid unnecessary details and focus on the importance of the topic.	The high mortality rate due to cardiac arrest has highlighted the need to increase the number of people trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) by identifying effective and cost-efficient training strategies. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of online training for citizens.
Methods This section describes how the study or project was conducted. It should include essential information about the study design, population, data collection tools, and analysis methods used.	An observational study was conducted on a sample of 50 citizens, divided into two groups: one received online training, while the other underwent traditional classroom training. The quality of CPR was assessed using mannequins equipped with sensors.
Results This part presents the main results obtained, preferably with concrete and relevant data. Avoid subjective interpretations and focus on providing clear information.	Participants in the online training achieved a significantly higher percentage of adequate chest compressions compared to those trained in the classroom (82% vs. 67%, $p < 0.05$). Online training allowed the same number of participants ($n=25$) to be trained in less time and with fewer material and instructor resources.
Discussion and Conclusions The final section summarizes the significance of the results and their practical implications for clinical practice.	The results suggest that online training could be an effective alternative to traditional classroom training, making CPR more accessible to a broader audience.

*This text is an example and it is not related to a real study.

the ability to effectively communicate research findings, thereby contributing to the advancement of the profession and the dissemination of best practices and experiences.

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Contributions: GI, conceptualization, investigation, formal analysis, writing- original draft preparation, writing - review & editing; NR, conceptualization, supervision, validation, writing – review & editing.

Funding: this research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflict of interest: GI is a member of the Scientific Committee of the Italian Resuscitation Council and the board of ANIARTI, the Italian Association of Critical Care Nurses; NR has no conflict of interest to declare.

Ethical approval: not applicable.

Received: 8 February 2025. Accepted: 18 March 2025.

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Scenario 2025; 42:628

doi:10.4081/scenario.2025.628

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