

How to Write an ELT Conference Abstract

At a recent TESOL International Convention & English Language Expo, I heard a number of comments about writing conference abstracts:

“Wow, she got three proposals accepted; she must be really good at writing conference abstracts.”

“My proposal didn’t get accepted: I guess I’m not good at writing conference abstracts.”

“There was an 18 percent acceptance rate of proposals this year. You have to be able to write a good abstract to have any chance.”

While the conference abstract is not the only important factor in determining acceptance or rejection to present at a conference, it is probably the most significant one. No matter how timely and relevant your intended presentation might be, if your conference abstract does not show that you have a proposal worth presenting, you risk not having your proposal accepted.

In my own experience, when I was a student in a master’s degree program, we practiced writing conference abstracts for a mock conference.

While this experience was meant to help us learn how to write an effective conference abstract, I felt more confused at the end of the writing exercise than I did at the beginning. In the process of peer review, everyone in my group was unsure about how to give feedback because none of us had a solid concept of the genre, of how the conference abstract should be written, or of the criteria for evaluation. Later, when I needed to write conference abstracts for actual conference proposals, I was still unsure about what to include and how to format them; it was with a surge of anxiety and uncertainty that I wrote each one.

I realized that I was not alone and that many of my colleagues were also unsure of what makes a conference abstract successful, even

those colleagues with considerable success getting proposals accepted. It was my desire to make the conference abstract for the TESOL conference a better understood and more user-friendly genre for everyone in the field of English language teaching (ELT), from novices to experienced academics, that inspired this article. In the article, I do the following:

- explain what the conference abstract is
- go over challenges of writing a conference abstract
- offer suggestions for preparing to write
- outline common requirements
- provide an overview and samples of the common parts of the conference abstract

- offer a checklist for reviewing the conference abstract
- explain the promissory abstract

My hope is that readers will finish the article with an understanding of conference abstracts and a clearer sense of how to write them effectively.

WHAT IS A CONFERENCE ABSTRACT?

A conference abstract is a concise summary of a proposed conference presentation. It is a stand-alone piece of writing that explains your intended presentation to the conference committee. As the conference abstract is often the only way in which the conference committee can judge your intended presentation, it is, by nature, promotional (Swales and Feak 2000, 2009). While some conference abstracts might be similar to research-paper abstracts, it should be clear that conference abstracts are not research-paper abstracts. Conference abstracts are independent pieces of writing that “succeed or fail on their own merits” (Swales and Feak 2009, 43). It is also important to understand that conference abstracts will vary depending on session type; that is, conference abstracts for research presentations are likely to differ from conference abstracts for workshops and other kinds of conference presentations.

THE CHALLENGE OF WRITING A CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Writing a conference abstract can be incredibly difficult. In part, this is because the conference abstract is an *occluded genre*—a hidden genre that is typically not available to the general viewing public and is usually confidential in nature (Swales 1996); other examples are research proposals and college admissions essays. While some conferences provide conference abstract samples and guidelines, many do not. Even when guidelines are provided, they are sometimes vague, with statements such as, “Abstracts will be evaluated on clarity and relevance to the conference theme.” Additionally, conference abstracts

are usually viewed only by the conference committee (the conference abstract is different from the abstract summary in the conference program), which makes locating models of successful abstracts challenging (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995; Halleck and Connor 2006; Payant and Hardy 2016).

Adding to the difficulty is the fact that a conference abstract needs to sell a potential presentation in a limited number of words (Halleck and Connor 2006; Swales and Feak 2000). The conference abstract is often a high-stakes genre. For many institutions, conference presentations are an important part of scholarship and professional development (Halleck and Connor 2006; Payant and Hardy 2016), and rejection to a conference can potentially mean loss of funding or a lost opportunity to present work to an audience of peers (Halleck and Connor 2006; Payant and Hardy 2016). However, while the conference abstract is of paramount importance to academics, there is little guidance available on how to write one (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995; Halleck and Connor 2006; Payant and Hardy 2016).

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

In this section, I outline important first steps for preparing to write a conference abstract: deciding what to present and understanding the proposal requirements.

Deciding what to present

Which comes first: preparing the presentation and then finding a suitable conference, or finding a conference and then preparing a presentation? There is no absolute answer. You might have already written a paper or have prepared a presentation that you would like to give at a conference. In this case, you would look for a suitable conference for your presentation—a conference that fits the topic and type of presentation you have prepared. Alternatively, you might first learn about a certain conference where you would like to present and then prepare your presentation. In this case, you might not even decide what you want to present until you know what the

conference theme is. For example, I presented at two Nepal English Language Teaching Association (NELTA) conferences. For the first one, I had already prepared a workshop on dialogue journals before I knew about the conference. The theme of the conference was “Transformations in ELT: Contexts, Agents, and Opportunities,” which I linked to the subtheme “Developing Reading and Writing Skills Differently.” For the second NELTA conference, I prepared my workshop “The Writing Process and Formative Assessment in Academic Writing” to fit the conference theme “Authentic Assessment: A Paradigm Shift from Traditional to Alternative Assessment.”

Understanding the proposal requirements

The first step is to look for the *Call for Papers*, which is sometimes also called the *Call for Proposals* or *Call for Presentations*. The *Call for Papers* is an announcement for an upcoming conference that is soliciting speakers. The *Call for Papers* will announce the conference and explain how to submit a proposal. Read the *Call for Papers* carefully. Abstract requirements as well as the language used to describe these requirements vary from conference to conference. Follow the guidelines for submission. Falling outside the stated boundaries—no matter how interesting or relevant your proposal—could be grounds for dismissal (Fowler 2011). Some conference committees require only one abstract. Most conferences, however, ask for two abstracts: a longer one and a shorter one. The longer abstract is for vetting and will be reviewed by the conference committee; the shorter abstract is for inclusion in the conference program (if your proposal is accepted) so that conference-goers can decide whether to attend your presentation.

Although most conferences follow this formula of abstract and summarized version, terminology differs and can lead to confusion. For instance, some call the conference abstract the “abstract” and the shorter version an “abstract summary” or “summary” or even “blurb.” Others call the shortened version the “abstract” and the longer version the “summary” or “session description.” Some simply ask for two abstracts; a shorter one and a longer one. In this article, I refer to the longer abstract,

used for vetting, as the *conference abstract* and the shorter abstract, included in the conference program, as the *abstract summary*.

Table 1 lists additional important guidelines for preparing a conference abstract.

THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

Conferences have themes and subthemes. Some themes are specific—the theme at the 8th Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching (PSLLT) Conference was “The Role of Technology in L2 Pronunciation Research and Teaching”—and some are more general, such as the Africa TESOL 2nd International Conference, with the theme “New Horizons in Language Teaching.” As a general rule, you want to link your presentation and, by extension, your conference abstract to the theme or subtheme. Listed subthemes can range from fairly restrictive to fairly general. Some conferences are open to receiving abstracts on topics relevant to the theme but not necessarily listed under the subthemes; for example, the Africa TESOL 4th International Conference accepted abstracts on the conference theme, subthemes, and “any other topic that has relevance to the conference theme” (<https://www.africatesol.org/call-for-papers2>).

Some conferences are open to receiving abstracts outside the conference theme and subthemes; for example, the Korean Association of Teachers of English (KATE) Conference has given priority to proposals that relate to the theme but welcomes all proposals with topics related to English language teaching. Unless the policy specifically states otherwise, submitting a conference abstract that is not relevant to the theme or subtheme can work against you.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF ABSTRACTS

Before starting to draft your conference abstract, it is important to have an idea about the factors that might help an abstract succeed or cause it to fail. Check the *Call for Papers*

GUIDELINE	DESCRIPTION
Time allotment	<p>Make sure that what you plan to deliver in your presentation is reasonable for the time given. A proposed presentation that seems impossible to deliver in the allotted time is likely to be rejected. Consider the difference between Example A and Example B:</p> <p>Example A: “In this workshop, the presenter will go over the history of music in composition, provide an analysis of what makes music a useful medium for helping students understand the composing process, and offer practical suggestions for helping students create compositions blended with musical scores.”</p> <p>Example B: “In this workshop, the presenter suggests there is a significant link between written composition and music and offers tangible suggestions for incorporating music in the composition classroom to improve student writing.”</p> <p>While Example A is broad and expansive and too much to undertake in one presentation, Example B is narrow and focused.</p>
Audience	<p>Make sure that your presentation is suitable for the intended audience. This might relate to specific groups, such as young learners, higher-education professionals, refugee and immigrant populations, and so on.</p>
Average length of key components	<p>The conference abstract is usually 300 words or fewer, the abstract summary is around 50 words, and the title is generally no more than 12 words. However, requirements vary from conference to conference.</p>
Length considerations	<p>Write as close as you can to the word limit without going over it. Researchers (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995; Egbert and Plonsky 2015; Halleck and Connor 2006; Payant and Hardy 2016) found that, on average, failed conference abstracts were shorter than accepted ones. This is perhaps because longer conference abstracts tended to be more developed and informative than shorter ones.</p>
Other frequently required components	<p>Most conferences usually require a biodata (usually of 50 words or fewer). Some conferences ask for keywords to accompany the conference abstract and abstract summary.</p>
Recycling proposals	<p>Note that some Calls for Papers will ask that you do not submit a proposal that has been submitted to another conference.</p>

Table 1. Important guidelines for preparing a conference abstract

or proposal guidelines for information on how your proposal will be evaluated (McVeigh 2012). Some conferences, such as the TESOL International Convention & English Language Expo (often referred to as “the TESOL Conference” or simply as “TESOL”) and those at the Universidad San Sebastián in Santiago, Chile, provide their rating rubrics with the Call for Papers. Others list general criteria for evaluation, such as the “Breakthroughs in English Language Teaching in the 21st Century”

conference held in Vietnam in 2018: “Abstracts must be no longer than 300 words and must be relevant to the conference theme and clearly describe the presentation’s purpose, methods, data sources, existing literature and potential contributions to the field” (<http://www.vnseameo.org/TESOLConference2018/>). For conferences that offer rubrics or other scoring guides, a good way to plan your writing is to aim to meet the requirements for the high-score criteria on the rubric (McVeigh 2012).

THE PARTS OF A CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

One way that researchers better understand specific genres is by analyzing common features that occur in a piece of writing. Understanding what affordances and constraints are typical in a genre can help writers plan and execute their own writing. This section explains the parts of the conference abstract.

What is a move?

Conference abstracts feature certain *rhetorical moves*. A rhetorical move is basically a functional unit, or part of a text, that serves a specific communicative purpose (Halleck and Connor 2006). There is no specific length for a move. While many conference-abstract moves are sentence-length, a move can be made up of more than one sentence or part of a sentence, and one sentence might have multiple moves (Halleck and Connor 2006).

BREAKING DOWN THE MOVES: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING MOVES IN TESOL CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

Based on previous genre studies, Halleck and Connor (2006) developed a framework of moves they identified as occurring in TESOL

conference abstracts. Payant and Hardy (2016) slightly adapted Halleck and Connor's (2006) framework by adding two moves: *Benefits to Attendees* and *Benefits to the Field*. While I have accepted Payant and Hardy's (2016) *Benefits to Attendees* move as an important adaptation to Halleck and Connor's (2006) original framework, I have rejected their *Benefits to the Field* move because they failed to explain this move and provide concrete examples. Furthermore, the *Benefits to the Field* move could possibly have a significant overlap with the *Gap* move described in Table 2.

Table 2 identifies 11 moves and provides a brief description. The purpose of explaining each move is to clearly illustrate the parts of a conference abstract so that you can use them in your own writing. It is important to understand that while a conference abstract might contain any of the moves listed in the framework, there is no cookie-cutter mold for conference abstracts; Halleck and Connor (2006) found that not every successful conference abstract contained every move, the sequencing of moves varied, and no move was an obligatory component.

A conference abstract could possibly follow the sequence in Table 2, but the moves are not

MOVE	PURPOSE
1. Territory	Gives a background or context of the given activity
2. Reporting Previous Research	Makes reference to previous related research or work
3. Gap	States something is missing in the territory or previous research
4. Goal	Gives the aim or objective of the study or presentation
5. Means 1	Specifies the actions that lead to the goal
6. Means 2	Indicates what will actually happen (method and procedure) in the presentation
7. Outcomes	Gives the expected results of the research or other activity
8. Benefits	Shows how the research or other activity relates to the real world
9. Importance Claim	Explains why the research or activity is important
10. Competence Claim	Tells why the presenter is credible to present on the given topic
11. Benefits to Attendees	Explains what session attendees will take away from the session

Table 2. Moves in TESOL conference abstracts (adapted from Halleck and Connor [2006] and Payant and Hardy [2016])

listed in an obligatory sequence. For instance, while the *Territory* move might often appear as the first move in a conference abstract, it might not appear at all, or it might occur in a position other than the first move, or it might be embedded in another move. While the number of possible moves in the given framework might seem overwhelming, it is important to realize that Payant and Hardy (2016) found in their research that no conference abstract contained all moves, and some moves—such as the *Importance Claim* and *Competence Claim*—occur infrequently.

In the following descriptions of rhetorical moves, I give credit to several former colleagues for the examples that they generously shared. Where I was unable to readily identify examples in the work they shared, I created examples for the purpose of illustration.

Territory

The *Territory* move establishes the background of your proposed presentation and as such is usually a broad, sweeping statement. Halleck and Connor (2006, 76) found the *Territory* move “in more than half of the proposals” they examined and reported that in most cases, the *Territory* was positioned as the first move.

Example: Assessment and evaluation are a serious and integral part of the instructional process, affecting not only students, but teachers, society, and the whole educational milieu. (Rosa Fagundes)

Example: With the ever more rapid movement of people and ideas, explaining our own cultures and learning about other cultures are things we both can and must do more often. (William Wolf)

Reporting Previous Research (RPR)

The *Reporting Previous Research (RPR)* move indicates previous research related to the topic. The *RPR* is frequently positioned after the *Territory* move (Halleck and Connor 2006).

Example: There are many publications and teacher handbooks on assessment

in Writing Workshops in K–12 settings (see Atwell 2009; Fletcher and Portalupi 2001; Urbanski 2006). (Bita Bookman)

Example: Process writing can reduce anxiety, build confidence, and improve overall student performance (Bayat 2014; Huang 2011). (Christina Torres)

The *RPR* move can also refer to important debates or research terms (Halleck and Connor 2006).

Example: While Truscott (1996, 1999, 2004, 2009) and Truscott and Hsu (2008) argue that corrective feedback on grammatical items does not improve grammatical accuracy in student writing and can even cause harm, other researchers (e.g., Doughty and Varela 1998; Doughty and Williams 1998; Ellis 1998; Ellis, Basturkmen, and Lowen 2001; James 1998; Lightbrown 1998; Tomasello and Herron 1989) have found that learners benefit from explicit error correction. (Example created for this article)

Several researchers indicate that the use of citations is an important way to display insider status and to show how the current study or activity fits into the broader research context (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995; Cutting 2012; Egbert and Plonsky 2015). The TESOL conference rubric specifically mentions citations or terminology related to the field for a high rating under its theory, practice, and/or research basis criteria.

Gap

The *Gap* indicates that something related to the *Territory*, or to the *Territory* and *RPR*, is missing or somehow problematic (Halleck and Connor 2006). The *Gap* is the heartbeat of your presentation; it is, after all, the motivation behind your proposed study and presentation (Halleck and Connor 2006). Halleck and Connor (2006) found that the *Gap* occurred in more than 50 percent of proposals and that it is often introduced by the word *however*. It might also be introduced by other transitions signals, such as *nonetheless*,

at any rate, still, yet, etc. Sometimes, though, it occurs without a transition signal.

Example: Still, both official reports and anecdotal evidence seem to indicate that mastery of English is not where it is expected to be despite widely shared views about its importance for job opportunities and social mobility. (Elka Todeva)

Example: However, the Writing Workshop model has not been adequately explored as a teaching and assessment model in higher education contexts, especially in first-year composition courses for English language learners. (Bitá Bookman)

Goal

The *Goal* states the main aim or purpose of the study or presentation and appeared more frequently “than any other move” (Halleck and Connor 2006, 78). The *Goal* often begins with statements like “The purpose/objective of this study ... ” or “This study addresses ... ” (Halleck and Connor 2006, 78).

Example: Using Hanauer’s (2008) definition of functional and non-place identity, this research project aims to look at the lived experiences of individuals whose dual (or multiple) citizenships have allowed them to have non-place identities. (Bitá Bookman)

The *Goal* is sometimes presented as several questions in bulleted or paragraph form (Halleck and Connor 2006).

Example: In order to develop valid and fair multiple-choice items, there are some principles that must be considered. For example, what is the construct that is being assessed? Is the item biased? How plausible are the distractors? Are the options exclusively mutual? Is there a double-key? (Bitá Bookman)

Means 1

Means 1 denotes the actions that lead to the *Goal*, such as methods, tasks, and procedures (Halleck and Connor 2006).

Example: In this study, 55 Ivorian teachers were given questionnaires to determine the strategies, techniques, and materials they used to become competent users of English. (Example created for this article)

Example: Dialogue journals were analyzed over the course of ten weeks for development of grammar and vocabulary skills. (Example created for this article)

Means 2

Means 2 refers to the actual methods used in the presentation and was often positioned as the final move (Halleck and Connor 2006). In some cases, *Means 2* specifically outlined what would be presented or discussed.

Example: The session begins with a brief overview of the characteristics of a successful assessment. Then, using a video clip, sample exam sheet, exam cards, and rubric, the presenter will demonstrate this method of oral assessment from planning to implementation. (Bitá Bookman)

Example: In this workshop, participants will experience, analyze, and discuss three principles of small group work for English language learners that maximize active learning while facilitating English language development. (Leah Jordano-Kudalis)

Means 2 often made mention of audience participation, a handout, or both (Halleck and Connor 2006).

Example: The participants share their own experience through discussion and in the Q&A sessions. (Bitá Bookman)

Example: Handouts will be provided. (Christina Torres)

Outcomes

The *Outcomes* move denotes the expected results or findings of the research or other activity; the *Outcomes* move often starts “either

with a description of the results or with their pedagogical implications” (Halleck and Connor 2006, 79).

Example: The results of this study suggest that the color of ink used for written feedback has no sort of psychological impact on students’ attitudes and beliefs regarding their written errors. (Example created for this article)

Example: The pedagogical implications of this study suggest that English language teachers could benefit from additional training on identifying and accommodating learning disabilities in the English language classroom. (Example created for this article)

Benefits

The *Benefits* move shows how the *Outcomes* of the proposed activity (e.g., the study, project, or workshop) can be useful in the real world. The *Benefits* move was found in fewer than half of the proposals (Halleck and Connor 2006).

Example: ... using a Tracking Chart as part of process writing instruction helps students to become self-aware of their own areas of strengths and weaknesses. (Christina Torres)

Example: The results of this survey can help teachers of English in under-resourced EFL contexts impart strategies and techniques for successful language learning to their students. (Example created for this article)

Importance Claim

The *Importance Claim* emphasizes the significance of the particular study or presentation and is sometimes signaled by the word *importance* (Halleck and Connor 2006, 80).

Example: In the current climate of trends towards developing better curricula for Writing in the Disciplines (WID), these findings are especially important. (Example created for this article)

Competence Claim

The *Competence Claim* states why the presenter is qualified to deliver a presentation on the proposed topic (Halleck and Connor 2006).

Example: The presenter has more than 30 years of experience in language assessment and is the author of two books on the subject. (Example created for this article)

Halleck and Connor (2006) and Payant and Hardy (2016) found that the *Importance Claim* and the *Competence Claim* occurred in very few conference abstracts; some conference-abstract writers chose to use one or both of these moves, but most conference-abstract writers did not include them.

Benefits to Attendees

The *Benefits to Attendees* move shows what session attendees can expect to take away from the presentation (Payant and Hardy 2016).

Example: All in all, participants will walk away from this workshop with the tools needed to energize themselves and their teams of learners for efficient and effective small group work. (Leah Jordano-Kudalis)

Example: At the end of this workshop, the participants will be able to confidently write, review, and revise multiple-choice items for formative and summative assessments. (Bitá Bookman)

FULL CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

Here I present two full conference abstracts in order to illustrate how rhetorical moves might be presented in a conference abstract. You will notice that neither sample has *all* the potential moves that could occur in a conference abstract. In their research, Payant and Hardy (2016) found that the majority of the conference abstracts they analyzed followed the general pattern of starting with the *Territory*, *RPR*, and *Gap* moves, and often concluded with *Outcomes* and *Benefits to Attendees*. Although only two samples are given

here, further analysis of conference abstracts would likely reveal numerous variations of moves in successful conference abstracts.

Sample full conference abstract 1

Title: Writing Assessment in Higher Education Using the Writing Workshop Model

[TERRITORY and RPR:] There are many publications and teacher handbooks on assessment in Writing Workshops in K–12 settings (see Atwell 2009; Fletcher and Portalupi 2001; Urbanski 2006). **[GAP:]** However, the Writing Workshop model has not been adequately explored as a teaching and assessment model in higher education contexts, especially in first-year composition courses for English language learners. **[MEANS 2:]** In this presentation, the presenter describes her experience implementing the Writing Workshop model and assessing students in a developmental writing course for international students in a university in the United States. The speaker will first introduce the Writing Workshop model and the opportunities it provides for systematic formative assessment of writing and grammar skills. Then, using examples and materials, the presenter will outline some challenges that a Writing Workshop may present in higher education and offers solutions. There will be time for Q&A at the end of the presentation. (Bitá Bookman)

Sample full conference abstract 2

Title: Using a Tracking Chart as Part of Process Writing Instruction

[TERRITORY:] International university students need to be successful writers not just in their English classes, but also in their future university classes. One critical aspect to success at the university level is the ability to produce clear writing and critically analyze their own texts. **[RPR:]** Process writing can reduce anxiety, build confidence and improve overall student performance (Bayat 2014; Huang 2011). **[GAP:]** However, research shows that students often repeat the same mistakes in spite of multiple written corrections from instructors. **[RPR:]** Students

need to understand the value of the corrections they receive in order to internalize them (Best, Jones-Katz, Smolarek, Stolzenburg, and Williamson 2015). **[MEANS 2:]** The presenters will demonstrate how using a Tracking Chart as part of process writing instruction helps students to become self-aware of their own areas of strengths and weaknesses.

[MEANS 2:] In this presentation, we will actively lead participants through the Tracking Chart and its efficacy using real student writing samples. We will begin by demonstrating the Tracking Chart used in our writing classes and explaining the three areas of correction covered in the Chart: content/organization, grammar, and formatting. The participants will be divided into groups to code a piece of student writing using the Chart. The groups will then report their results to predict at what point in the semester the writing assignment was submitted. The purpose of this exercise is for the participants to understand how the Chart is a visual representation of student improvement throughout the semester for both teachers and students. We will debrief this practice-oriented presentation by revealing the correction chart data from our class cohort to show patterns of progress and finish by reflecting on the implications for the session participants' own classrooms. Handouts will be provided. (Christina Torres)

FORMATTING AND STYLE CONSIDERATIONS

One paragraph or more?

Most conference abstracts are written as one block of text, but some are divided into paragraphs (Swales and Feak 2009). There is no absolute rule on this, but since conference abstracts are typically written as one block of text, break your conference abstract into paragraphs only if you have a compelling reason to do so.

Title of your conference abstract

The title of your conference abstract should clearly reflect your intended presentation and should interest potential conference-goers

(Fowler 2011). Swales and Feak (2009) recommend crafting a title that works as an attention-getter and suggest writing a title with a colon, such as “Winning Combinations: K–6 Partnerships in Florida” (Swales and Feak 2009, 57). While an attention-getting title might help your proposal stand out, do not favor a snappy title at the expense of clarity. Conference-goers, to a large extent, choose the sessions they want to attend based on titles alone—sometimes without actually reading the abstract summaries in the conference program. Misleading titles can result in disappointed audience members who had different expectations.

Additional stylistic considerations

Table 3 lists additional stylistic considerations for developing a conference abstract.

CHECKING YOUR CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Give yourself enough time to check and revise your conference abstract. Conference abstracts that are written the night before the submission deadline will likely appear rushed and underdeveloped. A well-written conference abstract often requires several drafts (Swales and Feak 2000). If possible, get feedback (McVeigh 2012; Swales and Feak 2000). Try to get feedback from insiders in the field of ELT (teachers, researchers, administrators). Observers outside the field might be able to give cursory feedback, but

they may not be able to match the degree of in-depth feedback that can be provided by someone in the field. Look to colleagues and superiors, especially those with experience submitting and reviewing conference abstracts. Give important attention to creating an error-free conference abstract. Egbert and Plonsky (2015) found that ratings were significantly higher for conference abstracts with no errors.

Use the checklist in Table 4 for self-evaluation or peer-evaluation to guide your revision. With peer-revision, it is a good idea to provide your reviewer with the guidelines for the conference you are submitting your conference abstract to.

ABSTRACT SUMMARY

Many conference proposals ask for an abstract summary that will be included in the conference program. If you need to submit an abstract summary, remember that the shorter abstract is a separate piece of writing; it is not a repetition of sentences from the abstract used for vetting purposes. Again, the purpose of the abstract summary is to help conference-goers decide whether to attend your presentation (Swales and Feak 2000, 2009). Typically, abstract summaries introduce the topic and then state what will happen in the presentation and are often limited to about 50 words. Sometimes the abstract summary will also indicate the intended audience. Following

Important Points on Style
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not directly refer to yourself or your institution in your conference abstract or abstract summary. Instead, refer to yourself anonymously in the third person, such as “the presenter.” • Do not use quotations; instead, paraphrase. • Do not use footnotes. • Do not include any figures or tables. • Do not use abbreviations. • Spell out acronyms in the first mention. The generally accepted practice is to write out the full name first, followed by the acronym in parentheses in the first mention—for example, “Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).” You can then use the acronym CLT by itself in subsequent mentions.

Table 3. Important points on style

are two abstract summaries that indicate the associated rhetorical moves.

Sample abstract summary 1

[TERRITORY:] The Writing Workshop model can provide ample opportunities for systematic formative assessment. **[MEANS 2:]** In this presentation, the speaker describes the implementation of the Writing Workshop in a first-year composition course for international students, the opportunities for assessment in comparison to traditional models of teaching writing, some potential challenges, and possible solutions. (Bitá Bookman)

Sample abstract summary 2

[TERRITORY:] International students must become academically proficient writers in a limited time frame. **[GAP:]** Even when instructors give written feedback, students

often do not attend to their mistakes.

[MEANS 2:] This practice-oriented session will demonstrate how correction tracking engages students and empowers them to take responsibility for their mistakes, resulting in improved written work. (Christina Torres)

THE PROMISSORY ABSTRACT

Ideally, you will already have prepared your presentation before you write the conference abstract. Logically, it is much easier to summarize work that has been completed than work that does not yet exist or is still in process. However, in the world of conference proposals, the ideal does not always occur (Swales and Feak 2000, 2009), and you might need to write a conference abstract for a study or presentation that is not yet finished. In such cases, you are tasked with writing a promissory

Checklist	Yes	No	Notes
1. Does the conference abstract fit all of guidelines for the intended conference?			
2. Does the conference abstract give the reader a clear idea of the intended presentation?			
3. Does the conference abstract show that in some way the presentation is innovative—a new way to deal with a problem, a new strategy, a new technique, a new approach, or a new perspective?			
4. Is there evidence that the presentation is in some way connected to the field’s body of knowledge?			
5. Does the conference abstract clearly link to the theme or subtheme?			
6. Does the proposed presentation seem to fit the intended audience?			
7. Does the proposed presentation seem to fit the time allotted for the presentation?			
8. Does the word count for the conference abstract come close to or reach the limit without going over?			
9. Is the title relevant to the presentation? / Is it clear?			
10. Is the conference abstract free of grammatical, mechanical, and spelling errors?			
11. Is the conference abstract free of abbreviations, quotations, symbols, and acronyms?			

Table 4. Checklist for reviewing a conference abstract

abstract, which is a representation of what you believe you will present (Egbert and Plonsky 2015; Swales and Feak 2000, 2009). In their research, Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) and Cutting (2012) found that the promissory abstract is actually rather common. However, reviewers are sometimes reluctant to accept promissory abstracts, aware that there is a chance that the work will not be finished on time or the actual presentation will be different from the conference abstract submission (Swales and Feak 2009).

Some Calls for Papers explicitly state that they do not want any proposals for studies that have not been completed, and some conferences require proposals to include papers or ask that papers be submitted prior to the conference (Curry and Lillis 2013) to ensure that presentations are not substantially different from their proposals. If you must write a promissory abstract, craft it in a way that does not show that your research is incomplete. Avoid language that would indicate that your abstract is promissory (Swales and Feak 2000), such as “My research will investigate . . .” and “After the data have been collected . . .,” and do not attempt to include any results and discussions that do not yet exist.

CONCLUSION

Because of the elusive nature of the conference abstract, coupled with the fact that it is a high-stakes, promotional genre, writing a conference abstract can be a challenging task. However, it is well worth the effort to master the task because it will enhance your prospects of getting your proposal accepted. Genre analysis of the conference abstract, though limited, helps presenters understand the rhetorical moves and potential arrangement that make up a conference abstract. An effective way to improve familiarity with the affordances and constraints of any genre is to practice. I suggest starting by writing a mock conference abstract for a presentation you have done in the past or would like to do in the future. You can then use the checklist provided in Table 4 to self-edit your proposal, get feedback

from a peer, or do both. After completing this exercise with one abstract, try another presentation idea. And if you are part of a class or network of teachers, you might suggest forming a group that practices writing conference abstracts and gives peer feedback.

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