

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## “Strategy”: The secret to writing a conference abstract in health professional education

L. Beckingsale<sup>1</sup>, H. Olson<sup>2</sup>, J. Robertson-Smith<sup>3</sup>, C. Ronayne<sup>4</sup> & M. Anakin<sup>5</sup>

---

**Keywords:** health professional education scholarship; academic writing; review comments; constructive feedback

As educators, researchers and students pursuing scholarship in health professional education, we may not know how to use the reader’s expectations in a conference abstract to our advantage. We may underestimate the crafting required to write a clear and concise abstract that is aligned with conference guidelines and reviewer expectations. We may find ourselves rushed to meet a looming deadline and dash off a quick summary of our project or practice. Consequently, we might wonder why our abstracts are not accepted for presentation. Authors of successful conference abstracts make use of expected conventions, strategically. An abstract that is strategically written is designed to entice a reviewer to want to learn more and recommend acceptance. We offer readers suggestions for writing a strategic conference abstract organised according to five common elements: introduction/background, methods, results, discussion/conclusion and title.

The **abstract** should begin by concisely outlining a problem that will grab the reader’s interest. It should focus on one key concept or issue that signals your perspective or signposts how you might build on previous efforts to address the problem (Lingard & Watling, 2021). Consider ending the introduction by stating the aim or purpose of the presentation.

If about research, then the **methods** should indicate the general study design, data sources and analysis. If about another form of scholarship, such as ANZAHPE’s conference abstracts that report on teaching innovations, then this section should describe the change to learning or teaching that was implemented, the context and the type of evaluation evidence. Given the brevity of this section, jargon may confuse the reader, therefore describe actions in common terms and simple language.

---

<sup>1</sup> Education Unit, Dean’s Department, University of Otago, Christchurch, New Zealand

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Dentistry, Department of Oral Sciences, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

<sup>3</sup> Practice Development Unit, Dunedin Hospital, Te Whatu Ora Southern, Dunedin, New Zealand

<sup>4</sup> Pathology Department, Dunedin School of Medicine, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

<sup>5</sup> The University of Sydney Pharmacy School, Sydney, Australia

**Correspondence:** Dr Megan Anakin [megan.anakin@sydney.edu.au](mailto:megan.anakin@sydney.edu.au)

The **results** should contain statements that are specific, relevant, illustrative and linked to the purpose and methods. This alignment highlights the main findings and signposts the focus of the discussion while avoiding getting bogged-down in minor details.

The **discussion** and **conclusion** should directly link key findings to the overall aim of the study. An elegantly crafted discussion section shows how findings can be interpreted to address the problem stated in the introduction, without repeating the results. This interpretation should demonstrate relevance or present implications to the audience. To avoid overstating findings, consider making modest and realistic claims about the impact or significance of the findings to others.

The **title** should be the last element crafted so it presents key ideas enticingly to grab the reader's attention. Remember, most conference participants generally skim the program, therefore the title of an abstract may be the only thing they read.

As educators and researchers, we appreciate strategically crafted abstracts that engage us with their clarity, specificity and succinctness. As students, we learn from examples around us. The five suggestions above may help us develop strategies to effectively communicate ideas to meet and, potentially, exceed our readers' expectations.

### **Conflicts of interest and funding**

We believe that no conflicts of interest exist. No funding was provided to produce this article.

### **References**

Lingard, L., & Watling, C. (2021). *Story, not study: 30 brieflessons to inspire health researchers as writers*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-71363-8>

---

Articles published in Focus on Health Professional Education (FoHPE) are available under Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives Licence ([CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)).

On acceptance for publication in FoHPE, the copyright of the manuscript is signed over to ANZAHPE, the publisher of FoHPE.