



THE BRITISH  
ASSOCIATION FOR  
CONTEMPORARY  
LITERARY STUDIES

**BACLS**

**HELP**

**SHEETS**

## **Writing and Submitting Abstracts for Conference Papers**

### **Preliminary Considerations:**

- Is the conference a relevant context in which to present your work?
- What aspect of your work might benefit most from discussion in that context?
- Go through the CFP and highlight keywords: what are the general themes of the conference? What are the keywords most relevant to your work?
- Highlight the important details: deadline; date of conference (can you attend should you be invited?); word length of abstract and bio (if asked); length of presentation; preferred presentation format (if given); whether the conference is inviting paper and panel proposals; preferred method of submitting abstract.
- If the conference is asking for panels it is worth taking some time and talking with colleagues—is there a group of you who might work together and who might benefit from collaboration? At large conferences it can be helpful to present as part of a panel as it enables some control over the context of your presentation; plus, it is fun to present with people you know and whose work you respect. If proposing a panel do discuss the format with your co-presenters—what would work best for the material you want to present? You might also want to consider issues of equal and diverse representation on panels.

### **The Abstract:**

- An abstract needs to outline the contents of your conference paper in a way that will be understandable to scholars who might not share your particular expertise. The abstract should be able to provide some context, highlight your key intervention and/or case study, and then gesture toward the conclusions you will draw. It also needs to be plausible—can you present the work you say you will in the time allotted?
- Abstracts should be as clear and as full as possible (within the word count!) so that conference organisers can get a strong sense of your work and the contribution you will make to the event.
- Abstracts are used to arrange groups of presenters into panels, so you need it to be as accurate a representation of your paper as possible.

- Conference organisers will be considering your abstract in terms of:
  - relevance to the conference
  - potential as exciting contributions to the conference
  - connections with other papers and panels

### **What to include in the abstract:**

- Title: Make sure to include a title for your paper. The title should have some connection to the contents of the paper.
- Context/Relevance: What is the context for your topic and why is it relevant to the discussion? What is the larger problem or conversation you are contributing to?
- Thesis Statement: What are your claims? What examples will you be using? Reference other scholarship where relevant (author-year). Be sure to explain any highly technical or expert vocabulary. Try to keep in mind clarity of expression and present any complex concepts as briefly as possible. You'll be able to carry out more in depth exposition in the paper itself!
- Conclusion: Although it is often the case that a conference abstract serves as a promise to ourselves to start new work, the conference organisers are looking for research that is well underway. Remember that there are no spoilers in conference abstracts: state up front what you will conclude and how you will get there; consider the implications of your research.
- "So What?": When you have a first draft of the abstract read it through and ask yourself whether you have answered the "so what?" question: that is, what does your research bring to the conference? Why does it matter? Have you got to the crux of what is significant about your work?

### **After writing the abstract:**

Go back over the CFP and check:

- Have you followed the guidelines?
- Does your proposed paper still seem relevant to the conference?
- Have you included a bio if requested?

### **Submitting the abstract:**

- Be sure to follow the instructions for submitting abstracts (e.g. even if you know the conference organisers personally, send it to the email recommended, not to a personal email).
- Make sure to put in a relevant email subject line, and to include a brief covering note e.g.

Dear Conference Organiser/Committee,

Please find attached my proposed paper for your consideration for the 'XXXX' conference.

Please let me know if you need any further information.

Kind regards,

Abc Xyz.