

- *why* think about writing conference abstracts?
 - it is important to bear in mind that, as a graduate student, you will not get on a conference program without writing an abstract, and that if you never get on a conference program while you are a graduate student, the linguistic community will take little notice of you — as in most other walks of life, you gotta be visible; conferences are there for the purpose of putting one's name and work on the map
 - it is never too early to start submitting your original work to conferences: you might get accepted, after all; if so, you will have a head start and your cv will boost a conference presentation right away
 - it helps you tremendously in your academic career to start practising abstract writing very early on: abstract writing takes very special skills which are much harder to develop than basic paper-writing skills; the earlier you start, the sooner you will have perfected those vital skills
 - ☞ TIP because abstract writing is not easy and takes time to perfect, it helps if, for every paper you write for a course, you try to work it into a one-page abstract, by way of exercise — as an added bonus, this exercise may very well improve the presentation of your arguments in your paper as well

- *when* to start (thinking about) writing a conference abstract?
 - start early in your career as a graduate student (see above), and start well before each deadline
 - be aware of conference calls for papers (announced on LinguistList)
 - make a note of deadlines for abstract submission for conferences that you find of interest
 - plan ahead, with the deadline in mind, so that you will have ample time to shape and reshape your abstract, and have it looked at by other people (faculty as well as students)
 - if by any chance you stumble upon a deadline very late (e.g., only days before the actual deadline for submission) but you really want to submit something to that conference because it is just the perfect fit for your work, still try to have your abstract looked at by at least one faculty specialist before you send it in

- *where* to start writing your abstract?
 - abstracts are basically written in one of three ways:
 - (i) on the basis of a bunch of new ideas that have not been worked out in any detail yet
 - (ii) on the basis of a full-fledged paper which fleshes out the arguments in full detail
 - (iii) on the basis of partially worked out ideas
 - these three ways of writing an abstract as a rule give rise to noticeably different results: abstracts of type (i) tend to sketch broad vistas without much detail; abstracts of type (ii) tend to be heavy on detail (because they are trying to compress a full-scale paper into one or two pages); abstracts of type (iii), by far the commonest type, are very specific in some parts but more speculative or open-ended in others
 - abstracts of type (i) are seldom successful unless the ideas sketched out are genuinely groundbreaking — reviewers will typically complain (rightly so) about the lack of detailed underpinning of the sweeping claims; types (ii) and (iii) are the kinds of abstracts to write when you are in graduate school

- *what* to put in your abstract?
 - it is absolutely essential that the first (two) paragraph(s) of your abstract make(s) it clear to the reader where you are headed *and what the point of the paper is* — reviewers will be much more gentle on abstracts when they know right from the start that there is an interesting empirical or theoretical discovery that the paper seeks to present than when the outset leaves the reader in the dark as to the aims and contributions of the paper (reviewer's Q: *why am I reading this?*)

- it will be important as well to reserve space at the end of your abstract for a brief recapitulation of your paper’s accomplishments, focusing particularly on the *theoretical consequences* of some of the nitty-gritty that occupies the core of your abstract (reviewer’s Q: *what does this buy us?*)
 - for abstracts of type (ii), there is always a risk of overkill — trying to put too much of the paper’s nitty-gritty into the body of the abstract may result in a text that, though faithful to the paper it is based on and doubtless very intriguing, becomes essentially undecipherable; bear in mind that reviewers get more than just your abstract to judge, so try to make it easy on them and suppress as much of the nitty-gritty as you can without sacrificing the essentials of what you have to say (reviewer’s Q: *what on earth does it say here?*)
 - for abstracts of type (iii) (and *a fortiori*, of course, for type (i) as well), what is needed is a certain amount of bluff, covering up the fact that (many) parts of the story just have not been worked out in any detail yet — jump the gun and *state* what you think is the solution to some of the problems you have not quite figured out yet; do not lose yourself in modals and hedgy adverbials (reviewer’s Q: *does the author have a clue at all?*)
 - if your current state of knowledge demands (a) *stipulation(s)* at a key point in the abstract, make sure you make every effort to *embed* the stipulation(s) to the best of your ability — and at all cost, avoid ending your abstract on a stipulative note (reviewer’s Q: *does this explain anything?*)
 - if your abstract addresses facts from one particular language or from one particular kind of phenomenon, it generally helps (unless the conference you are submitting to is specifically dedicated to the study of this language (family) or this particular phenomenon) if you can show what consequences your analysis of these specific facts has for the analysis of facts from other languages and empirical domains (reviewer’s Q: *is this more than a footnote?*)
 - especially if your abstract is on a language that is not your own, be sure the facts have been carefully double-checked with native speakers — chances are that at least one of your reviewers will be a native speaker of the language you are discussing (reviewer’s Q: *are you serious?*)
 - always provide exemplification of the key points; you usually have one additional page at your disposal for examples, so use it to the full: reviewers are often annoyed when empirical claims made in the body of the abstract are not illustrated with the aid of an actual example so that they can see it with their own eyes (reviewer’s Q: *where are the facts?*)
 - make sure your abstract is firmly embedded in the extant literature by providing references to relevant work at the relevant points in the exposition; if you have space at the end of the abstract, squeeze in a little bibliography (reviewer’s Q: *what’s old stuff and what’s new?*)
 - finally some stylistic points (perhaps trivial but always worth stressing): write clearly, succinctly; carefully weed out typos and syntax errors; avoid redundancy to save space but do make sure that the reader hits upon the key claims by placing them prominently in the text; choose your title with care (you will want it to cover the paper’s content, to highlight its main contribution, and, if possible, to be catchy) (reviewer’s reaction at the end: *this is a fine paper*)
- *where* to send your abstract?
 - some conferences are harder to get into than others; it is not hugely realistic to expect to be accepted at a conference such as GLOW or NELS in your first year as a graduate student — though these things do happen; it never hurts to set the bar high
 - specialised workshops and poster sessions are often relatively easy to get into; they give you a good opportunity to present your work (though in certain domains of linguistic inquiry — such as hard-core theoretical linguistics — posters are a suboptimal vehicle for the dissemination of ideas) and to get in touch with others working in your area
 - when you are beginning to get a clear picture of your dissertation topic and your thesis is starting to take shape, it becomes imperative to submit abstracts based on your thesis research, to position yourself prominently on the job market