16th World Congress of Bioethics (WCB)
Basel, Switzerland
20 - 22 July, 2022

Congress of the Feminist
Approaches to Bioethics (FAB)
18 - 19 July, 2022

University of Basel
Institute for Biomedical Ethics

How to write an effective abstract for a conference

The main goal of a conference abstract is to summarize the key points of the paper that you are going to present during the conference. As such, it needs to include sufficient information for reviewers to judge the nature and significance of the topic, the adequacy of the investigation, the nature of the results, and the appropriateness of the conclusions. It should also be clear, concise and appealing for the reader.

As a general rule of thumb, looking at examples of successful abstracts in your field is quite useful when starting to prepare your submission. It will help you narrow down what are the main points that make an abstract effective. In addition, start the preparations of the abstract early and don't wait until the deadline. Having time to re-edit the abstract will increase its quality in time.

Title: the title should be concise and possibly catchy in order to immediately grab the attention of the reader. At the same time, ensure that the title describes the subject you are writing about.

Abstract body: for WCB 2022 abstracts should not exceed 250 words and should be structured in four paragraphs: introduction, methods, outcome, conclusions. Make sure you clearly define the topic of the paper and the research question you are trying to answer. The abstract should state how your research was conducted: what were you trying to do, how did you do it, what did you find. Briefly summarize your methods and results neutrally and without judgement. In the conclusion you can put emphasis on the potential impact of your work. Why are your findings relevant? What conclusions can be drawn from your research?

Language: abstracts are supposed to be concise, but at the same time informative. Keep the sentences short to convey just as much information as needed and avoid using words or phrases that do not add any specific content or value. In addition, unless your abstract is of a highly theoretical/philosophical nature, keep the language simple and clear. Clear abstracts in plain English are usually more appreciated than complex, non-accessible and overly-sophisticated contributions. Also, it is generally considered best to avoid the use future tense in an abstract. If you can't avoid it then specify clearly what you will do and when.

Editing: After you finish writing your abstract, put it aside and get back to it with a fresh mind. This will help you edit it to improve its quality and effectiveness. Also, if you are in doubt, ask a colleague to proofread your abstract. This will increase the chances that your work is written clearly and without mistakes.

In summary:

- come up with a title that is catchy but not misleading;
- clearly state your research question and topic of your contribution;

- be concise and avoid unnecessary long phrasings;
- use plain English to increase the abstract's clarity – avoid future tenses if you can;
- don't wait until the last minute - be sure you have the time to set aside the abstract and to get back to it with a fresh mind. Ask a colleague to help with proofreading to avoid mistakes.

Good luck with your submission!