

Writing a proposal for **anzea** Conferences

anzea Conference presentation preferences

Evaluations of **anzea** Conferences have indicated that our Conference delegates have a general preference for presentations that:

- Are participatory
- Allow plenty of time for discussion
- Focus on skills and theory development.

Purpose of an abstract

An abstract is a brief summary of your paper/presentation written in a formal style. The abstract should give a clear sense of your key ideas, your method (if you are presenting research), theoretical underpinnings, and your conclusions. A successful abstract succinctly encapsulates the key messages of your piece of work and helps the reader to see if it is of interest to them. Your abstract should stimulate curiosity and hook the reader into wanting to know more.

Features of a successful abstract

- A clear link is made to the conference theme
- Language is reasonably formal
- Written as one paragraph
- Maximum 200 words (**note**: word limits are *strictly* observed – **anzea** will request word reduction of abstracts/proposals that are over the word limit)
- The abstract should have a strong structure and avoid repetition
- Key ideas are summarised only, not elaborated
- Links to the wider field of inquiry and knowledge are noted to ‘position’ the work
- Specialist language of the relevant field/discipline may be used, but content should be readily understandable by people who work in the field and other key stakeholders (e.g. evaluands, purchasers of evaluation)
- Where external sources of information are referred to, references must be provided
- Where the presentation format is participatory, the abstract should state how the audience will be involved
- Depending on your presentation format (e.g. seminar, paper presentation, group discussion), you may also need to include some description of the format. It is useful to outline what those attending are likely to get out of the presentation, and what opportunity there will be for their participation (e.g. Q & A, audience discussion).

How to write the abstract

The main aim of a conference abstract is to let delegates know whether this is a presentation that they will be interested in. As such, it needs to clarify key ideas that will be explored and present them as a coherent argument that advances the body of knowledge and/or practice in your chosen topic - and, perhaps, with a view to getting some feedback from your conference audience.

Consider the following steps:

- Identify your chosen topic/aspect of evaluation, in the light of the Conference themes
- Why is this topic/aspect of interest to you and important or interesting for evaluation practitioners to know about?
- Write an introductory statement about the topic as a point of interest (e.g. issue or innovation) to 'hook' the reader in – see the sample abstracts provided below
- Clarify the 3-4 (no more!) main points that you want to make.

Now, write one sentence (20-25 words) about each of the following; you might vary the order of the sentences, depending on what aspect you want to emphasise:

- What is the focus of your piece of work (i.e. your hypothesis, or big idea)? Think of this as your topic.
- What is the context of your topic - why is your topic important and relevant?
- How does the topic relate to the Conference theme?
- What is the particular issue or challenge you are exploring?
- What has 'happened'? That is, very briefly outline, if appropriate, of relevant activities, developments or experiences that you will describe in the presentation.
- What message/big idea(s) do you want the audience to be left thinking about at the end? (NB: this is often where challenges are noted and/or further areas for inquiry proposed)
- What will the audience learn or be prompted to think about? If you aim for the presentation to be participatory, how will you achieve this?

Further points

- Devise a catchy title (8-12 words) that accurately reflects the key ideas/message of your work.
 - Read the Conference abstract guidelines and/or template again carefully - check word limit and other requirements - and edit your abstract to suit.
 - Identify a colleague with appropriate expertise to peer review your abstract. Use the guidelines above and peer feedback to revise and polish your proposal. *Don't forget to check spelling and grammar, and make sure that you have completed all parts of the proposal form.*
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Acknowledgement

Thanks to Steve Tracey and Pam Oliver of **anzea**'s Conferences Standing Committee who developed these guidelines.

Other resources on writing abstracts

anzea, the full set of the **anzea** Conference 2012 abstracts:
http://anzea.org.nz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=108&Itemid=116

Massey University, *Academic Writing Guide*, Student Learning Development Services, Edited by Dr Natilene Bowker, 2007:
<http://owll.massey.ac.nz/academic-writing/academic-writing-e-book.php>

Click on 'Academic Writing' for a PDF file of the handbook, see for example, p.83-84 on abstracts. This handbook has very comprehensive and useful advice on academic writing more generally.

Victoria University, Wellington, Student Learning Support Services:
http://www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/slss/studyhub/handouts.aspx
This resource shows you how to work backwards from a finished paper to an abstract.

Berkeley University, USA:
<http://research.berkeley.edu/ucday/abstract.html>
This resource has links to a wide range of abstracts across topics in the arts, humanities and natural and social sciences.

Examples of successful proposals submitted to **anzea** Conferences

<p>Note: The relevant anzea Conference theme was: <i>Evaluation in the real world – relationships, roles, responsibilities and results</i></p>
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Example 1

Hot tips for commissioning and managing actionable evaluation	Catchy title
High quality, worthwhile, and actionable evaluation doesn't just depend on the technical competence and effective consultation skills of the evaluator. Decisions made and actions taken (or not taken) by the client can make or break the value of evaluation for an organisation. High-value evaluation is the product of a fruitful interaction between a well-informed client and a responsive, appropriately skilled evaluation team.	Succinct background information Clear links to conference theme
In this session, we combine the internal (client) and external (evaluation contractor)	Outlines what

<p>perspectives on lessons learned from both stunningly high value evaluative work (“dream projects”) and bitter disappointments (a.k.a. “Nightmares on Eval Street”), and use these as a foundation for a “hot tips” guide for those who commission evaluation, and for the evaluators who work with them, demonstrated with examples.</p>	<p>will be covered</p>
<p>We believe it is time for a radical rethink of the RFP process and the usual approach to evaluation project management, and we look forward to sparking a lively interactive discussion. We hope the audience will share their diverse evaluation perspectives on this subject, drawing on their own real world experiences.</p>	<p>Describes audience opportunity for participation</p>
<p>Evaluators helping clients get maximum utilization and value for their evaluation dollar will find this a useful guide for advice, support, and utilization-focused thinking and action.</p>	<p>Describes what participants will gain from the presentation</p>

Example 2

<p>Ngā Huarahi Tika – using a transformative evaluation framework for dual therapeutic and evaluative outcomes</p>	<p>Title indicates the topic and focus</p>
<p>Increasingly purchasers of evaluation are expecting both highly customised evaluation and an element of evaluation capacity-building in what they purchase. Ngā Huarahi Tika is based in Manurewa and supports tamariki and whānau who have been identified as at risk of not benefiting from the school system. Typically these whānau experience a range of barriers to benefiting from educational and other societal opportunities. The programme’s Pou (support workers) work over 2-3 years with each whānau to identify their individual and collective goals in education, whānau development, whanaungatanga, cultural identity, and community engagement, and then to work systematically towards achieving those goals.</p>	<p>Opening statement sets out the issue and links to conference theme</p> <p>Background and context of the innovation are described</p>
<p>Ideal Success collaborated with Pam Oliver and Jon Postlethwaite to develop a unique evaluation framework that would empower participating whānau members – adults, tamariki and rangatahi – to identify their personal progress as an indicator of both their own personal effort and achievement and the programme’s effectiveness. The Pou support whānau members to evaluate their own progress, thus developing an ethic of reflective practice.</p>	<p>Outlines how the innovation was trialled</p>
<p>Sam, Pam and Jon will outline the processes and tools that they used to build the framework, and then discuss how it works in practice, and the skills needed to use this approach.</p>	<p>Indicates a focus on skills development</p>
<p>We will also invite the audience to share their ideas of ways in which evaluative systems can be used for therapeutic and transformative outcomes.</p>	<p>Describes the audiences opportunity to take part</p>

Example 3

<p>Contesting the 'real': Evaluation and control of narratives</p>	<p>Title is provocative</p>
<p>Who decides which reality we live in? It's an easy charge – 'come into the real world'. But as any teacher will attest, in a class of 30 students there are 31 realities. Realities are not manageable in such numbers, so we reduce them – we live in collectives - enough to make for a choice: 'I'll vote for them – you for the others'; 'The climate is changing – I don't believe you'; 'In my culture we do this. Really? in mine we do it differently'.</p>	<p>Opening statement clarifies the issue</p>
<p>Evaluation thrives on diversity. If everyone agreed on a single programme reality (logic), we would be measuring outputs as though they were valued by all stakeholders in the same way – as though programme = consensus. It rarely does. And yet, we seemingly live in a world increasingly dominated by single narratives: 'This programme is the 'right' thing to do', 'Humans are changing the climate in catastrophic ways', 'We can no longer afford State provision at current levels'.</p>	<p>Sets out the issue and links to conference theme</p>
<p>The original intention behind programme evaluation was to proliferate narratives, to deny singular 'narrative control', to affirm to government the political and contested nature of programmes. What are our responsibilities as evaluators when our contracts so often assume consensus and singular reality?</p>	<p>Further describes the issue and links to conference theme</p>