

## THE ESSENTIALS OF ORAL ABSTRACT PRESENTATION

### What is an abstract?

An abstract is a short synopsis of a research study.

- A **written abstract** is printed on the first page of nearly all research publications and allows the reader to discern the reason for, methods, results and conclusions of a study without having to read the entire manuscript. It can be anywhere from ~125 – 450 words in length.
  - Researchers can also submit a written abstract of their study to be considered for presentation at a national meeting prior to the actual completion or publication of the work. Doing so is an important opportunity for scientists to get their research recognized on a national/international scale, to network with other researchers, and stay on the cutting edge of research findings.
- An **oral abstract** is a concise presentation of research findings by an investigator whose written abstract was competitively chosen, based on merit, by his/her peers for presentation at a research symposium. This presentation can either be a short oral power-point presentation of the research or a poster.

### How is the written abstract formatted?

The written abstract is formatted according to specifications set forth by the meeting and these instructions are usually posted on the meetings' website. All abstracts must contain the following elements:

- 1) Statement of Purpose
- 2) Hypothesis or Objectives
- 3) Materials and Methods
- 4) Results
- 5) Conclusion/Relevance

Care should be taken to writing a concise, powerful and grammatically correct abstract as acceptance of your work will be based on the written abstract alone.

### How is the written abstract submitted?

The abstract is submitted (usually online) for consideration as an oral presentation or poster. You can indicate your preference for oral or poster, but this is usually up to the reviewers.

- Often requires a submission fee (usually around \$60)
- Abstract peer-reviewed
- Abstract rejected or accepted as an oral presentation or poster
  - Oral presentation slots are generally given to only the best abstracts; if asking for an oral presentation, it is generally best to also indicate that you are willing to give a poster if needed.
  - At some meetings you will be asked to give both an oral and poster abstract!

### When is it appropriate to submit an abstract?

Philosophy varies with the investigator....

Type A. Only present data that are complete and ready to submit for publication

May be worried that data could be “scooped” by others at the meeting

May consider any possibility that conclusions could turn out incorrect is unacceptable

May not want to publically disclose a patentable finding (will start the clock ticking)

Type B. Present data that are in progress that you feel comfortable with the results of

\*\*\*Avoid practicing “salami science” – cutting up a single project into little pieces that are submitted separately but simultaneously for presentation in order to make you look more productive.

Note – abstracts are not really considered “peer-reviewed”, often contain frankly incorrect data that never makes it to publication, and (in general) should not be cited as a definitive study. In general a sign of a productive scientist is one that advances nearly all of their abstract presentations to a final publication (this quality can be ascertained by looking at the # abstracts –vs- # publications on their curriculum vitae).

J Vet Med Educ. 2006 Spring;33(1):145-8.

### **Delay in final publication following abstract presentation: American College of Veterinary Anesthesiologists annual meeting.**

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#### **Abstract**

**RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY:** A review of abstracts presented at nine annual meetings of the American College of Veterinary Anesthesiologists was undertaken to determine the average time to publication and the differences found between conference abstracts and final publications. Concerns about and advantages of using such abstracts in our teaching are considered. **METHODOLOGY:** Conference proceedings during the years 1990 through 1999 were considered. Key word and author searches using two common search engines were carried out to find whether abstracts presented had been published. The original article or its abstract was reviewed for consistency with the conference abstract. **RESULTS:** Of 283 abstracts examined, 73.5% were published in journals as full articles. The overall delay (+/-SD) in publication was 24.3 +/- 21.0 months. Common reasons for not publishing included too little time, more interest in carrying out the work than in writing it up, and other more demanding tasks. Authors indicated the intention of completing a submission on approximately 10% of the unpublished abstracts. The final articles reviewed showed major differences in key aspects from the abstract presented in 7% of the cases. In half of these cases, clinical action could have been affected by a change in emphasis of the conclusions. **CONCLUSIONS:** Because of the delay in publication of research, peer review of standardized abstracts should be encouraged. This material can be used to introduce students to new drugs, techniques, and results that may not otherwise become available until after their graduation. However, caution must be exercised in using this information, both because significant differences were noted in final publications and because unpublished research may be poorly interpreted at the time of presentation. This study emphasizes the value of critical review and lifelong learning in our careers.

#### **How do you organize your abstract publications on your curriculum vitae?**

Your abstracts should be in their own section, separate from your list of original research publications. An example might be the following:

Tolbert MK, Leutenegger CM, Lobetti R, Birrell J, Gookin JL. Evaluation of the role of *Pentatrichomonas hominis* and enteric coinfections in canine diarrhea. *J Vet Intern Med* 2011. 29th Annual Forum of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine, Denver, CO; June, 2011 (oral).

Make sure to include all authors, journal where the written abstract was published, title location and date of where the abstract was presented, and whether it was an oral abstract or poster.

## **How is the oral abstract presentation formatted?**

### **Format of Presentation**

- 1) **Title slide** (1 slide)
  - Title of the manuscript – be specific and positive
  - Authors of the manuscript and their affiliations – order of authors is important
    - The “corresponding author” is considered to be the brain-trust/principal investigator/grant-bearer of the work
      - In basic research this is usually the last author
      - In veterinary research this is often the second author
  - \*\*\*make the career decision now where you want your name to consistently appear\*\*\*
    - The first author is considered the one who did most of the work and writing and is usually in training (residency, Ph.D. etc)
  - Conflict of interest disclosure ( $\pm$  may be presented as slide #2 after the title slide)
  - Acknowledge your University by including the logo <http://cvm.ncsu.edu/emd/logos.html>
- 2) **Background/Introduction** (3-4 slides)
  - Assume audience doesn't know about your interest area
  - Teach only as much as is needed to understand why you did the study
  - Why did you do the study? What information was lacking that prompted the study? Why is this study the best idea ever?
  - Sources of key facts and figures should be referenced by citation or website URL (smaller font)
- 3) **Hypothesis and Specific Aims** (1 slide)
- 4) **Materials and Methods** (3-4 slides)
  - Be organized – order the methods in a manner that facilitates understanding of what you did
  - Break into segments if multiple techniques performed
  - A picture can be worth a thousand words
  - Make sure to include statistical means for data analysis
- 5) **Results** (3-6 slides)
  - Tell a story!!
  - Title each slide with a conclusive statement
  - Give one-sentence rationale for why you did each experiment and how it led to the next
  - Know what your next slide is going to be and anticipate the transition (practice!)
  - Show data in graph form if possible; always orient audience to pictorial/graphical data before explaining
  - Use the pointer only when needed to influence where you want the audience to look
- 6) **Conclusions/significance** (1-2 slides)
  - Bullet statements
  - Limitations/Future directions (may be a separate slide)
    - Point out only the limitations that are significant
- 7) **Acknowledgements** (1 slide)
  - Source(s) of funding
  - Personal acknowledgements are uncommonly included in abstract presentations – not enough time for this
  - Author contact information

- Do not put a list of references at the end of your presentation

If there is data that you don't have time to include and you think it is likely that someone may ask about, you can have a backup slide of this just in case.

### **General Tips**

- Practice, practice, practice
- Speak clearly and not too fast (give the audience time to understand what you are saying). A presentation that is too difficult to understand or follow is not a sign of impressive research
- Avoid saying "um" – pauses are perfectly acceptable
- Look at the audience and not your slides
- Hold the pointer with 2 hands and use judiciously

### **Slide layout**

- Keep visuals CLEAR and SIMPLE. Abbreviate your message.
- Make sure your font style and size, location of bullets and layout is consistent on all slides.
- Avoid the overuse of too many colors, bullets, patterns, graphics, or animation in one frame (carnival effect).

### **Presentation of data**

- Simple graphs, charts and diagrams are much more meaningful to an audience than complex, cluttered ones.
- Don't include data on your slides that you are not going to talk about.
- Don't apologize for mistakes (typos etc) found during presentation (it only makes it worse)

### **When answering questions**

- Always repeat the question if not asked using a microphone
- If asked a question you don't know an answer to do not bull#\$\$%. Speculate or say how good the question is and that you don't know the answer. Always acknowledge the usefulness of any recommendations.
- Take note of any questions you were asked or criticisms as they are likely problems that need to be preemptively addressed in the final manuscript.

### **Avoid stress by planning ahead**

- 1) What are the time requirements? Speaking (range 6–20-min)–vs- questions (2–10-min)? Will there be a timer and what will be its settings?
- 2) Where do you need to be and on what day and time?
- 3) What should be the format/version of your presentation (slides, ppt, video etc)? Does the presentation need to be uploaded in advance of the session? Always bring a back-up copy of your presentation to the meeting (hard drive, thumb drive, CD).
- 4) Familiarize yourself with the room; podium, microphone (stationary or lavalier), computer, slide advancement controls, pointer system (do you need to bring your own?).
- 5) Practice the abstract in the same room if possible.
- 6) Dress like a professional
- 7) Remember you are proud of your work, open to suggestions to improve your work and are honored to have been invited to present your work – congratulations!