Purpose

This document aims to support ANZCA fellows and trainees in the preparation of scientific abstracts for the purpose of conference abstract submission. The preparation of abstracts for journal submission will not be specifically covered, although many of the principles apply to both.

What is an abstract?

An abstract is a concise summary of an academic work. The nature of the work will be specified in the conference eligibility criteria and may include original research, audit, quality improvement or case study.

Why do conferences make a "Call for abstracts"?

Scientific meetings are an opportunity to present very recently completed research for comment and discussion. From the pool of submitted abstracts, conferences will select those that may be eligible for poster/e-poster presentation, oral presentation, or presentation in certain prize categories. Some conferences provide monetary and/or prestigious prizes for the top-scored abstracts, following oral presentation.

A "Call for Abstracts" is usually made several months prior to a conference, with the closing date 2-3 months before the conference, to allow for scoring of abstracts and notification of authors.

What are the rules of submission?

Each conference will have its own eligibility criteria and guidelines for submission. Some important features that may be specified include:

- One co-author must be a member of the conference organisation;
- At least one co-author must register for and attend the conference, which usually includes registration fees (check if this is in-person or virtual attendance):
- Ethics approval number and/or patient consent may be requested;
- Results are usually mandatory at the time of submission (for example it is not acceptable to write "results will be available soon");
- Abstracts may only be eligible if results have not been previously published, or in some instances previously presented;
- There may be eligibility criteria for certain prize categories;
- There may be a limit on how many abstracts can be submitted by one submitting author;
- The submitting author may be required to declare that all other authors have given permission for submission.

As each conference is different, **it is recommended that you read the fine print carefully.** If you still have queries, clarify by emailing the organisers.

What are the formatting rules?

Each conference will have their own formatting rules. Some important features that may be dictated are:

- Word count. This is very important. If an online submission system is being used, the words in excess of the limit will not appear, leaving an unfinished sentence or summary. A common word count limit is 250 words, however other conferences have character limits e.g. "3500 characters including spaces".
- Language may be specified.
- The author information that is required (e.g. name, affiliation, address)
- Structure: for most abstracts this will be similar to: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, References.
- References – usually a limit on the number of references, two to three.
- Some conferences permit figures or tables in the abstract.
- Some conferences will provide the criteria by which your abstract will be scored.

Tips for writing the body of the abstract

- Many authors have difficulty with the strict word count. Concise writing takes practice, to retain brevity of the text, without losing meaning. It is useful to look at some published abstracts to see how others have managed this word limit.
- Spell out words before abbreviating e.g. body mass index (BMI).
- Request that all the co-authors read and edit the abstract.

Introduction: One or two sentences describing the problem or reason behind this work. This section is likely to need a reference. The Introduction and Discussion should be the shortest sections and both much shorter than each of the Methods and Results sections.

Methods: This section should summarise the methods used, including selection criteria, data collection methods, statistical analysis. A reference may be required here. The Methods and Results should be the longest sections.

Results: You will not be able to fit every single result in here, so decide on your main message and provide the results that support that message. This may include the time period of the study, demographics (age, sex, body mass index) and main outcomes with relevant analyses.

Discussion: One to three sentences summarising the main result and why it is important. Re-visit your Introduction and make sure the content of the Introduction and Discussion are tied together.

References: Only key references are needed. Check to see if these are included in the word count – if so, consider the use of abbreviated references.

Tips for making the online submission

Don't leave it until the last minute! Because:

- Submission deadlines are not usually flexible. Check the time that submission closes (it may be in a different time-zone).
- Entering all the author names, affiliations and addresses can be time consuming and you might need to check some details.
- The submission platform may request responses to questions that need to be clarified with your team – allow time for this. This may include: ethics approval or exemption numbers, obtaining specific permission from all your co-authors and whether or not the data have been presented previously.

What happens after submission?

Usually more than one abstract reviewer will score your abstract based on pre-defined criteria. These may include elements such as relevance to the specialty; language and readability; description of methods; clarity of results; and nature of the study design.

The final abstract score and ranking will determine:

- If your abstract is accepted or rejected;
- If your abstract is eligible for poster or oral presentation (or both);
- If your abstract is eligible for a prize session.

If you are selected for a poster or oral presentation, the conference organisers will provide details specifying what is required for each of these. If you decide to proceed, registration for conference attendance is likely to be expected at this point.

Good luck!