# Creating Effective Presentation and Poster Abstracts

Your presentation has been accepted at a conference — perhaps the next [LABCON](https://labcon.csmls.org/)? The topic is important and the information is new. You hope that sharing an abstract with the world will change the way laboratories work. The title is catchy, clever and grabs attention. But, there is one more factor to consider when convincing potential viewers that your presentation is the one to be at: the presentation description/abstract.

The purpose of the abstract is to provide an overview of the content of the presentation or poster. It can be tempting to promise a lot of content or leave it vague to spark curiosity, but that doesn’t always work out! “Over-selling” and then not delivering the promised information can lead to unhappy attendees feeling you wasted their time, yet “under-selling” might not generate interest in attending.

## **Aspects of Writing a Good Description**

Each conference committee sets their own criteria for successful abstracts. Some even have character limits — so pay attention! There are several common aspects that should be addressed and on which you can hone your writing skills. When summarizing, it’s important to include a few key points so that the audience understands the scope of what the presentation is trying to accomplish.

* The abstract should start with a **brief background** on the topic and **why this specific topic is important**. While it is especially important in research presentations to highlight where the research fits and what it contributes to the body of knowledge, this also helps the audience understand the significance of the topic before delving into an informative presentation. Keep this to three sentences — two for the background and one for the rationale.
* You will want to add in your project’s **purpose statement** as well. This is usually 1–2 sentences.
* For presenting research, the **methodology** should be outlined, and **major results** should be provided. It might feel hard to do, but use only 1–2 sentences for the methodology and a maximum of 3 sentences for the major results.
  + The full scope of results, including limitations, problems encountered, analysis and troubleshooting, should be discussed in the presentation itself (when the attendee is already interested and has committed their time to learning more about your study).
* The **significance, applications and implications** of this knowledge should be mentioned. We know you will have lots to say! Try to limit yourself to one sentence for each of these components.
* **Do not add excessive detail!** You can do this in the presentation itself — if all of the interesting content is in the description, no one will attend your presentation. The key is to provide just enough detail to generate interest in learning more about the topic.
* Depending on the conference committee requirements/limits, you may have room to **include next steps** in your description, whether for future research or how laboratories can use this information to improve.
  + This might be a part of your discussion within your presentation. Think of different ways to include the next steps outside of the abstract if you don’t have space.
* **Consider the principle of WIIFM** — “What’s In It For Me?” Include 5–10 key words on your topic to generate interest based on your target audience.
  + Remember, medical laboratory professionals, managers and supervisors, safety and quality specialists and other health professionals may find different concepts interesting.
* **Want a few other thoughts**? Well, make sure you don’t write your abstract in the future tense (only past tense should be used), consider the level of language required for the conference (Is it academic, scientific or professional development?), and make sure to consider how you will be presenting (e.g., poster, presentation, panel, rapid fire session) so that the abstract fits with the format you will use.
* Can your **abstract fail**? [Read this article to find out](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225064376_Writing_a_research_abstract_Eloquence_in_miniature)!

Want some additional resources? Check out these links for more tips and tricks:

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| * [Successful Scientific Writing and Publishing: A Step-by-Step Approach](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6016396/) * [Doing Science: Writing conference abstracts](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265553174_Doing_Science_Writing_conference_abstracts) * [How to get your abstract selected for a short talk at a conference](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHLP2WX8UVc) (video) * [Examples of abstracts](https://unilearning.uow.edu.au/report/2bii1.html) | * [Let Me Speak! A Reviewers’ Guide to Writing a Successful Meeting Abstract](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6294637/) * [Automatic jargon identifier for scientists engaging with the public and science communication educators.](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0181742) * [The Lab Report](https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/types-of-writing/lab-report/) * [Principles of Good Writing: Avoiding Plagiarism](https://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2016/05/avoiding-plagiarism.html) |