

WRITING AN ABSTRACT

When answering a call for papers a number of factors need to be kept in mind to ensure that your abstract has a good chance of being accepted.

- Ensure that your ideas are well thought out and follow a logical, coherent flow:
 - state the issue to be discussed
 - give a brief background to the issue
 - brief description of what you are doing about it
 - implications/outcomes: why is what you've done important?
- Ensure that the abstract relates to the conference theme:
 - in a 'real' and not contrived way: if it doesn't fit then don't submit
 - an interesting and catchy title helps:
 - but make sure it's not too 'clever' or obscure
- Ensure that practical aspects of the abstract comply with requirements:
 - it meets or is under the specified word length
 - is typed in the specified font type, size
 - spacing and setting out are correct
 - if no guidelines are given then a standard format is usually:
 - 300 words
 - Times 12pt font
 - 1.5 line spacing and centred on the page
- Limit amount of references cited in abstract:
 - use only if essential to support your argument
 - detailed references can be covered in the resulting presentation/paper
- Look at past abstracts/conference papers to pick up the tone and style of that particular organisation's conferences
- Run your abstract past someone familiar with both the topic you wish to present and the conference style: such as a university lecturer, work colleague, member of professional society, someone who has presented before at the conference
- Submit on or before the due date and in the required way:
 - electronically, via e-mail, is usually preferred
 - ensure computer compatibility of documents (especially in converting Macintosh to IBM formats)
 - saving in 'Rich Text Format' in Word is better (*.rtf)
 - not all are able to access documents in html formats easily – stick to established word processing programs such as Word
- Ensure you include your name, title, organisation and contact details, including phone, fax, street address and e-mail
- Finally, remember that your abstract serves two purposes:
 - to interest and intrigue the committee so they will select it
 - to introduce/outline your topic for the conference handbook – so it needs to stand alone **as a record of your presentation**

Checklist: Parts of an Abstract

Despite the fact that an abstract is quite brief, it should in most cases include the following sections. Each section is typically a single sentence, although there is room for creativity. In particular, the parts may be merged or spread among a set of sentences. Use the following as a checklist for your abstract:

- **Motivation:**
Why do we care about the problem and the results? If the problem isn't obviously "interesting" it might be better to put motivation first; but if your work is incremental progress on a problem that is widely recognized as important, then it is probably better to put the problem statement first to indicate which piece of the larger problem you are breaking off to work on. This section should include the importance of your work, the difficulty of the area, and the impact it might have if successful.
- **Problem statement:**
What *problem* are you trying to solve? What is the *scope* of your work (a generalized approach, or for a specific situation)? Be careful not to use too much jargon. In some cases it is appropriate to put the problem statement before the motivation, but usually this only works if most readers already understand why the problem is important.
- **Approach:**
How did you go about solving or making progress on the problem? Did you use simulation, analytic models, prototype construction, or analysis of field data for an actual product? What was the *extent* of your work (did you look at one specific area or take a wider view?) What important *variables* did you control, ignore, or measure?
- **Results:**
What's the answer? Specifically, most good computer architecture papers conclude that something is so many percent faster, cheaper, smaller, or otherwise better than something else. Put the result there, in numbers. Avoid vague, hand-waving results such as "very", "small", or "significant." If you must be vague, you are only given license to do so when you can talk about orders-of-magnitude improvement. There is a tension here in that you should not provide numbers that can be easily misinterpreted, but on the other hand you don't have room for all the caveats.
- **Conclusions:**
What are the implications of your answer? Is it going to change the world (unlikely), be a significant "win", be a nice hack, or simply serve as a road sign indicating that this path is a waste of time (all of the previous results are useful). Are your results *general*, potentially generalizable, or specific to a particular case?