

Writing Conference Proposals

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Overview

- **Discuss role of academic conferences**
- **Explain the importance of themes within conference proposals**
- **Review structure and strategies for writing proposals**

Academic Conferences

- **Conferences are important outlets for discussing early research**

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- **Many publications begin as conference presentations**

Academic Conferences

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- **Hearing early research can highlight new trends**

Academic Conferences

- **Discussing early research can help you get feedback**
- **Hearing early research can highlight new trends**
- **Also provide networking opportunities**

Conference Themes

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- **Theme = a foundational premise that will tie together all presentations or sessions**
- **Themes can be specific ideas, keystone authors in a fields, or current circumstances**

Conference Themes

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- **Sometimes the theme is discussed directly**
- **Other times the theme is implied in how the chair contextualizes the conference**

Conference Themes

- **Here are two important lessons about conference themes**

Conference Themes

- **First: conference organizers really like their themes**

Conference Themes

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- **Second: many times, reviewers don't really know what their theme means**

Conference Themes

- **A proposal must not only explain your presentation, it must explain how you are defining or applying a given theme**
- **Show how your research can help expand a conference theme (not just repeat a theme)**

Conference Themes

- **Simply having a good presentation idea is not enough**
- **Organizers can sense “copy-and-paste” proposals that don’t engage with a theme**

Writing Proposals

- **Let's review some strategies for writing proposals**

Writing Proposals

- **Let's review some strategies for writing proposals**
- **Identify specific moves to makes and questions to ask keep in mind**

Writing Proposals

- **A successful proposal will do the following:**

Writing Proposals

- **Identify the context of your research**
- **Define key terms that are central to your research**
- **Describe the structure of your presentation**
- **Explain goals or outcomes of your presentation**

Writing Proposals

- **These steps are usually accomplished in the order I just listed**
- **Walk through each step and identify some useful writing strategies**

Writing Proposals

- **Identify the context of your research**

Writing Proposals

- **There are two general writing strategies that can be used to contextualize your research**

Writing Proposals

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- **First: frame your research as attempting to solve a problem**

Writing Proposals

- **There are two general writing strategies that can be used to contextualize your research**
- **First: frame your research as attempting to solve a problem**
- **Second: frame your research as building upon an opportunity**

Writing Proposals

- **If you take the “problem” approach, you need to identify the specific problem and explain the risks associated with this problem**
- **Here are some questions to consider**

Writing Proposals

- **Is this problem discipline-specific or broader?**
- **What are the causes and consequences of this problem?**
- **Have researchers tried to address this problem? If so, why have previous solutions fallen short?**

Writing Proposals

- **If you take the “opportunity” approach, you need to summarize an emerging trend and explain how this trend brings up new possibilities**

Writing Proposals

- **What specific trend are you capitalizing upon? What is novel about this trend?**
- **What type of untapped possibilities are presented by this trend?**
- **Have scholars discussed these untapped possibilities? If so, how are you building upon this research? If not, why is your approach new?**

Writing Proposals

- **Don't try to apply the “problem” and “opportunity” strategies at the same time**

Writing Proposals

- Don't try to apply the “problem” and “opportunity” strategies at the same time
- In many cases, your research will attempt to solve problems and build upon opportunities
- However, starting with a single focus will streamline your ideas

Writing Proposals

- **Contextualizing your research is one opportunity to reinforce the theme of the conference**

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- **Contextualizing your research is one opportunity to reinforce the theme of the conference**
- **A theme might revolve around a current problem or an opportunity created by emerging developments**
- **In these cases, you can respond to a conference theme based on your framing mechanism**

Writing Proposals

- **After offering context, you need to define your key terms**
- **Key terms can be a method used to gather data and analyze data, a variable that will be examined throughout an experiment, or criteria that will measure the success of a initiative**

Writing Proposals

- **If you take the “problem” approach: how can your key terms help address this problem?**

Writing Proposals

- **If you take the “problem” approach: how can your key terms help address this problem?**
- **Can your key terms address a variable that has been overlooked?**
- **Do your key terms resonate with the causes or potential risks of this problem?**

Writing Proposals

- **If you take the “opportunity” approach: how can your key terms capitalize upon a new trend?**

Writing Proposals

- **If you take the “opportunity” approach: how can your key terms capitalize upon a new trend?**
- **Do your key terms highlight new possibilities afforded by the trend you identified earlier?**
- **How can your key terms offer avenue for further inquiry or application?**

Writing Proposals

- **If you haven't already responded to a theme when offering context, defining your key terms can be another opportunity for discussing a theme**

Writing Proposals

- **If you haven't already responded to a theme when offering context, defining your key terms can be another opportunity for discussing a theme**
- **In short, you can define and characterize your key terms in through a conference theme**

Writing Proposals

- **Example: recent conference revolved around the theme of “common places”**

Writing Proposals

- **Example: recent conference revolved around the theme of “common places”**
- **I discussed how we teach canonical texts and what voices/perspectives might get overlooked (identified a problem)**
- **Redefined the “canon” as a “common place” because scholars share a working knowledge of canonical texts**

Writing Proposals

- **In this case, I reframed and redefined my key term through the theme of the conference (as opposed to using the conference theme to contextualize my presentation)**
- **Other situations might be more straightforward but be aware of moments where some interpretation might be warranted**

Writing Proposals

- **After establishing context and key terms, you should provide an overview of your presentation**

Writing Proposals

- **After establishing context and key terms, you should provide an overview of your presentation**
- **Overview is descriptive and structural**
- **You can literally say “This presentation will first do X, then Y, then Z...”**

Writing Proposals

- **Keep brevity in mind**

Writing Proposals

- **Keep brevity in mind**
- **Focus on the most important feature of your evidence and findings**
- **If there were difficulties or obstacles you needed to negotiate, acknowledge the most important issue**

Writing Proposals

- **Lastly, identify the main goals or outcomes of this presentation**
- **Who can benefit most from your findings?**
- **What specific contributions can your research make to on-going conversations?**

Writing Proposals

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Writing Proposals

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- **The audience of your proposal are conference organizers**

Writing Proposals

- Last step is tricky because it deals with “audience”
- The audience of your proposal are conference organizers
- However, organizers are thinking of their audience (conference participants) when reviewing proposals

Writing Proposals

- **Yes, you are trying to persuade organizers to accept your proposal**

Writing Proposals

- **Yes, you are trying to persuade organizers to accept your proposal**
- **Most effective mode of persuasion: show how your presentation can reinforce the impact of the conference**
- **Show how your presentation can benefit attendees and, by extension, support the conference**

Writing Proposals

- **Let's recap**

Writing Proposals

- **Identify the context of your research**
- **Define key terms that are central to your research**
- **Describe the structure of your presentation**
- **Explain goals or outcomes of your presentation**

Writing Proposals

- **Quickly review some writing strategies to avoid**

Writing Proposals

- **Avoid confrontational language when offering context**

Writing Proposals

- **Avoid confrontational language when offering context**
- **Don't use words such as "right" versus "wrong" when identifying a problem**
- **Oppositional language is bound to offend the conference reviewers or attendees**

Writing Proposals

- **Avoid simply repeating the theme of the conference**

Writing Proposals

- **Avoid simply repeating the theme of the conference**
- **Saying the same abstract word in every sentence does not clarify the nature of your research**
- **Remember, it is your goal to teach reviewers how you are interpreting a given theme**

Writing Proposals

- **Avoid generalizations when discussing concurrent research**

Writing Proposals

- **Avoid generalizations when discussing concurrent research**
- **Unlike abstracts, proposals can include references to outside research**
- **Citations or references can reinforce the relevance of your work or clarify your key terms**

Writing Proposals

- **Lastly, be selective. It is fine if you need to pass on applying to a conference**

Writing Proposals

- **Lastly, be selective. It is fine if you need to pass on applying to a conference**
- **Sometimes a theme is too different from your research**
- **Avoid spending time writing a presentation that won't advance your research or teaching**

Writing Proposals

- **Time, energy, and money are all limited resources**

Writing Proposals

- **Time, energy, and money are all limited resources**
- **Attending a conference requires a lot of planning and logistics (setting aside time to write, moving around teaching schedule, etc.)**
- **Going to many different conferences a year may not be the most effective use of your energy**

Writing Proposals

- Questions?