

Submitting a successful abstract to CAOT Conference 2019

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The annual conference of the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) is the premiere educational event for practitioners and researchers in occupational therapy across Canada. The conference provides the opportunity to hear about cutting-edge research, learn new skills, and improve practice. We would like to encourage everyone to share important occupational therapy research and practice knowledge by submitting an abstract to next year's conference in Niagara Falls, Ontario. This article provides a description of the abstract submission process and suggestions to increase the likelihood that an abstract will be accepted.

The submission and selection process

You submit your abstract via the CAOT website. You will need to write a 250-word abstract that must use the following headings (depending on whether it is a research- or practice-based presentation, respectively): 1) Introduction OR Rationale, 2) Objectives, 3) Methods OR Approach, 4) Results OR Practice Implications, and 5) Conclusions. You will also need to include a 50-word summary for publication in the program. Each abstract undergoes blind peer review by three occupational therapists, selected among practitioners and academics from across the country. Abstracts with conflicting reviews are subjected to additional review. The Conference Scientific Program Committee (CSPC) uses these evaluations to inform the selection of presentations. The aim of the CSPC is to create a balanced, scientifically rigorous conference that addresses contemporary issues and covers the breadth of occupational therapy practice.

Choosing the format for your presentation

The first thing to consider when writing an abstract is the medium through which you want to convey your message. There are four main categories currently proposed for CAOT Conference 2019:

1. A **poster** allows all information about a study to be presented simultaneously, and poster presentations are a great venue for informal dialogue. The poster format may suit presentations of preliminary results or shorter messages that do not require a longer session. This format may be appealing for first-time presenters.
2. The **podium presentation** involves a formal oral presentation with time for questions at the end.

4. An **extended discussion** actively engages delegates throughout the session using formats like small group discussions, case studies, and demonstrations. Because these interactions are what distinguishes extended discussions from other types of presentations, your abstract must specify how you will engage participants.

Writing a compelling abstract

Abstracts may be submitted in French or English. Currently, we judge abstracts according to three main criteria: 1) quality of the presentation's content, 2) educational value, and 3) quality of the writing. It is crucial to write the abstract in a logical way that is easy to follow. In terms of presentation quality, we grade an abstract based on how well it addresses each of the five required headings. For example, repetition of material under each heading should be minimized. There should be no surprises (e.g., results that are not congruent with the methods that you described). Although you may provide projected or preliminary data for research abstracts, abstracts will score higher if completed study results are specified. Practice-oriented presentations should be evidence based. In terms of educational value, it is important to convey how the presentation appeals to occupational therapists and to state how it contributes to theory, research, or practice. In terms of the written quality of the abstract, appropriate grammar and skillful language use are extremely important. Given the high calibre of submitted abstracts, ensuring yours is well written (i.e., logically organized, grammatically correct) and contains innovative ideas/methods will greatly increase the likelihood it will be accepted.

The following is a list of tips compiled by the 2018 scientific committee members.

Before you write, make a plan:

- Start writing your abstract early. You will want to gather as much input as possible, especially from all your co-authors.
- Consider how your abstract aligns or resonates with the conference's theme. While explicit connections with

the conference theme are not necessary, identifying alignments can help your abstract stand out.

- Contact all co-authors with a work plan. Indicate your plan to write the abstract. Indicate the dates that you will be seeking feedback from them. All authors must approve the final draft. It is unethical to submit an abstract that has not been reviewed and approved by your co-authors.

Once you start writing:

- Write using the active voice. This makes your writing more compelling and less wordy.
- Keep your writing succinct. Refer to the writing resources below for editing tips.
- Avoid generic sentences that lack specific information and do not advance the abstract.
- Avoid jargon (i.e., overly technical words). Remember that your reviewers may not be content experts in your area.
- Describe the knowledge gap addressed by your work and keep background information brief. The bulk of your abstract should be about what you will present, not what is already known on the topic.
- Focus on building your “take-home” message. If you are writing a research abstract, consider what made your research unique and why the findings are important. If you are writing a practice abstract, consider what is innovative about your practice topic and how it applies to others. Keep your content evidence based. In an abstract for an extended discussion, specify how you will structure your session and how you will engage participants.
- Citations are allowed. Include them if they are relevant and support your abstract’s content.

While you are writing:

- Check your grammar and spelling. Word processing programs have grammar and spell check functions to identify common errors (e.g., run-on sentences, subject-verb agreement problems, use of passive voice).
- Ensure your writing is clear. Use websites

hemingwayapp.com or the [Writer’s Diet Test](#) to identify areas to revise.

- Integrate strategies from recommended resources such as:
 - [Writing Short is Hard: A Blog for Researchers](#)
 - [University of North Carolina Writing Centre – Handout on Abstracts](#)
 - [University of North Carolina Writing Centre – Handout on Style](#)
 - [University of Toronto Writing Centre – Wordiness: Danger Signals and Ways to React](#)

After you have completed your draft:

- Have peers read your abstract to catch any missed grammatical and spelling errors. Ask them for specific feedback on overall readability.
- Seek feedback from peers on the content of your abstract. It may be of benefit to ask those who are knowledgeable about your topic as well as those who are unfamiliar with it to ensure the content is both appropriate and easy to understand.
- Ensure that your methods and approach, as well as results and conclusion, support your objective(s) and aim(s).
- Ensure that the conclusion does not repeat the results. The conclusion should summarize the impact of your work and emphasize your take-home message(s).
- *Revise and revise some more.* Eliminate unnecessary or descriptive words. Revise again.
- Submit to the CAOT conference!

For many occupational therapists, presenting at our national conference is a highlight of their careers. Not only does this afford you the opportunity to add an extra ribbon to your conference nametag, but, more importantly, it helps you become more engaged in the profession. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to share your passion with others and absorb their enthusiasm in return. We look forward to seeing you present at the next conference!

About the authors

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