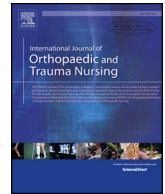




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## International Journal of Orthopaedic and Trauma Nursing

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Practice development in orthopaedics and trauma

## Developing and writing a conference abstract

Beverley Gray

Guernsey

Have you seen a call for papers/abstracts for a conference and wondered, 'Could I do that?', only to shy away from the challenge and opportunity with anxiety and ignorance over how to approach the task? This paper aims to dispel some of the fears behind such a venture and provide logical and systematic guidance to empower you to embark on the path towards conference presentation. You will also be introduced to the experiences of attending conferences, from both a delegate and presenter viewpoint.

**The purpose and value of presenting at conference**

A professional conference is a meeting usually attended by those who share a common area of interest and wish to learn from experts and those who have conducted research or undertaken innovations in that area. The sharing of knowledge and ideas is usually the main focus. There are numerous benefits to both attending and presenting at a conference relevant to your area of health care practice. Some of these include:

- Conference presentations allow you to share your clinical, academic or research work during many stages of development of the work. It may be that you have undertaken a literature review, completed an audit or plan to discuss methodologies for research or study findings.
- Being a delegate or presenter at a conference also provides you with the opportunity to attend numerous exciting orally presented and poster sessions while at the conference/congress/convention. Such an opportunity can provide you with current and valuable information from the presenters and the chance to discuss their work and ideas in person.
- Representing your field of interest allows professional colleagues outside your own locality to be aware of the work being undertaken in your particular field and in your local area. It is also important that you can share your work with people outside your specific discipline to provide interested individuals with more information. It will raise your professional profile on a personal level as a topic expert, as well as enhance the profile of the whole team involved in the work.
- Conferences provide a platform for you to enhance your presentation skills and discussing your work at such an event will help you

with other ways of sharing your work, such as future conference presentations, dissertation or theses defences and teaching and learning activities.

- A history of conference presentations will show potential employers that you regularly disseminate your activities to colleagues as well as gaining a current overview of others work. This can be a highlight in any curriculum vitae and can also provide evidence of professional development for professional bodies.
- Conference presentation and attendance provides networking opportunities in abundance to allow you to interact with others to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts.

**Start by choosing a conference**

The most obvious place to start is by identifying the conference that is most appropriate for you. There are several things to consider:

- You should ensure that the conference fits with your professional identity. Whilst it may be interesting to attend an event that is laden with medical or allied healthcare presentations, this may not be the place to present your paper and gain the most from the other presentations given. Once you have gained experience at conferences, either in presenting or attending as a delegate, then you will be more able to identify suitable events.
- The theme of a conference is usually apparent and you should seek to identify whether its focus is clinical, educational, research or a mixture of these. You may feel more comfortable with one particular genre of subject matter. If you have work to present that has a clinical basis then choose that conference or if you wish to present some research findings from a dissertation or thesis then choose the conference best suited to your paper.

The location may determine when and where you first present. Whilst conferences in foreign climes may sound exciting (and indeed they are), you might have to consider practicalities such as funding for travel and accommodation as well as cost of the conference plus seeking leave of absence. Presenting at a conference does not mean the organisers cover your costs, so there is still a large outlay financially. For this reason you may choose to consider a local or national conference within your own country initially and gain experience before attending

E-mail address: [bglwork@gmail.com](mailto:bglwork@gmail.com).

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**Table 1**

Organisations that regularly organise conferences relevant to orthopaedic and trauma practitioners.

Organisation	Web site
Australian and New Zealand Orthopaedic Nurses Association (ANZONA)	<a href="http://www.anzona.net">www.anzona.net</a>
Canadian Orthopaedic Nurses' Association (CONA)	<a href="http://www.cona-nurse.org">www.cona-nurse.org</a>
Danish Orthopaedic Nurses' Association (FSOS)	<a href="http://www.fsos.dk">www.fsos.dk</a>
Fragility Fracture Network	<a href="http://www.fragilityfracturenetwork.org">www.fragilityfracturenetwork.org</a>
National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses (NAON)	<a href="http://www.orthonurse.org">www.orthonurse.org</a>
AADO	
Hong Kong Orthopaedic Nurses Association	<a href="http://www.hkoa.org">www.hkoa.org</a>
Royal College of Nursing Society of Orthopaedic and Trauma Nursing	<a href="http://www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/forums/society-of-orthopaedics-and-trauma-nursing">www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/forums/society-of-orthopaedics-and-trauma-nursing</a>

an international event.

Conferences can be local, regional, national and international. A selection of organisations which regularly organise conferences relevant to orthopaedic and trauma practitioners are identified in [Table 1](#). This is not an exhaustive list and there are other local, regional and national organisations that may be known to you.

Attending conference, both as a presenter or delegate, is an excellent opportunity to network with like minded professionals and gain knowledge and expertise to bring back and share with your workforce colleagues. Hence, your employer or an external funding organisation may be willing to fund your attendance providing you can demonstrate how it will benefit you and the organisation you work for.

### Types of presentation

The types of presentations you can consider will vary depending on the event organisers and their format or theme. One common option is to present a poster. This is a visual representation of the work you have undertaken; and may be educationally or clinically based such as a literature review or research project findings, clinical audit results, practice development implementation or a patient case study. You can present the information using text, graph, picture, statistics or other design formats. The conference organisers will provide guidelines about the poster presentation and the abstract proposal you are expected to submit. You may be expected to stand at your poster board to be present for questions from delegates viewing your work. Presenting a poster is not as simple as it might sound as there is considerable skill in developing something that gets the message across in a way that is readable, impactful and concise with suitable illustrations. There is excellent advice about this available through an internet search.

Gaining experience of a conference as a poster presenter is a good way to test the water; then you may wish to proceed to an oral presentation. You could also pursue this from the outset if you are experienced and confident in public speaking. Most conferences will have a variety of options available for your presentation including plenary, main, concurrent, symposia and workshop.

A plenary (or main) session is one in which all delegates would attend that takes place in the main hall of the venue. These are sessions that are relevant to all delegates and tend to be focussed on topics and research of significant importance to the professional community. The session may include a broad range of content; sometimes speakers are invited to give such presentations because they are experts in their field or because they have important work to share with others. These are often called Keynote presentations.

These 'main hall' sessions are often used to introduce and to conclude the day's events, as well as having renowned experts in a chosen field present to the wider delegate audience.

Concurrent sessions invite the attendees to break into smaller groups for presentations and are usually themed, dedicated to certain topics, roles, skill sets or interests. They take place at the same time in different rooms, allowing delegates to choose shorter presentation that they are most interested in. This format also allows the delegate to move between sessions and themes. These sessions are a good option for

less experienced presenters as the audiences tend to be smaller than plenary sessions and are, therefore, less intimidating. Sessions are usually supported by a 'chairperson' or 'moderator' who is often an experienced speaker whose brief is to support the presenters in that stream of sessions and keep things running smoothly and on time.

Workshops may be discussion based, and/or include audience participation, allowing all present to participate in questions and answers, identifying possible developmental projects for future participation. They may also be of a practical nature enabling individuals or groups to update their skill set and are usually provided by experts in the field or by equipment company personnel. You may be that expert in a particular area of expertise or working with materials or devices that you are knowledgeable about.

### Meeting the brief of the conference organisers

Conference organisers will ask for a proposal for your presentation, often called an abstract. This is a brief overview of your plans for your presentation. Usually the organisers will publish guidelines and structure for the abstract to which you need to adhere closely; often this can be written and submitted using an online form. Your abstract will be judged along with all presenters' proposals and there may be an element of competition between proposals. There will only be so many slots and you want your proposal/abstract to stand out as being of relevance and good quality.

Taking a close look at what the conference organisers are looking for is essential before you start work on your abstract. You should be familiar with the 'call for papers' (sometimes called the 'first announcement') themes and ensure that your work fits the expectations of this and is relevant. This links with making sure the conference is the right one for you to present at and attend. Take cognisance of the maximum word count as most scientific committees who read and select submitted abstracts will have strict criteria to follow. Simple syntax guidance should be used with clarity of meaning in good grammar and no typographical errors.

The format of the abstract proposal is usually set out by the conference organisers and may either allow you free text or give you more rigid headings to follow. You should include all information requested to avoid your paper being discarded due to simple oversights. Meeting the published deadline for submission in the call for papers/abstracts is essential; submit it too late and all your work will be to no avail.

### Writing the proposal/abstract

Consider the title of your presentation; while you may want it to stand out and grab attention, you should attempt to keep it short, specific and clear. A catchy title of a few words is a way to grab the attention of the reader but should then go on to contain keywords that are specifically related to the main body of the paper and provide an adequate description of your work.

The abstract must be clear and concise, providing a summary with all information requested relating to the proposed presentation; there should be nothing new or unexplained crop up here. A useful guideline

**Table 2**  
Bloom's verbs (Bloom, 1956).

Knowledge	Define, describe, identify, label, quote, recall, write
Comprehension	Demonstrate, discuss, explain, identify, interpret, review, summarize
Application	Apply, change, dramatize, prepare, select, transfer, use
Analysis	Analyse, classify, compare, debate, examine, relate, research
Synthesis	Create, design, develop, integrate, organise, perform, plan
Evaluation	Appraise, choose, critique, evaluate, justify, prove, select

is to use concise complete sentences with some key phrases from the presentation. Try to relay your enthusiasm for the work whilst maintaining professional language. This is where you can identify the topic being addressed and define what type of project it is, e.g. a case study, research, clinical audit or service enhancement. A simple introduction to a specific research methodology and dates of work may be useful. You should give a brief overview of the findings you will be able to discuss, as they may only be intermediary in the stage of the project so far. It may be acceptable to submit an abstract for work that is not finished but will be complete by the time the conference takes place.

The abstract should not provide a lengthy background discussion for the work nor reference other work. You should avoid incomplete sentences, abbreviations or confusing jargon and terminology. Check your text for typographical errors and do not use illustrations, tables or figures.

Follow the advised layout for the abstract proposal and be aware of any word count limitation.

### The role of the scientific committee or advisory panel

Your abstract/proposal will be considered by a committee/panel. Your abstract will be anonymised and will, most likely, be reviewed independently by two reviewers. A scoring system may be used that reflects the needs of the conference delegates. The persons on these committees panels are usually experts in their fields with experience of research and publication as well as conference presenting. They work together to conceptualise and design the conference programmes and oversee the selection of papers and participants.

The scientific committee of all professional conferences plays an important role in the decision making process of potential participants. Members of conferences' scientific committees will have multiple evaluation criteria to ensure high levels of quality in their selections. They are responsible for recruiting invited speakers, finalizing the programme schedule, reviewing and selecting presentations (oral and poster) and often review and select potential nominations for awards. You need to bear this in mind when writing your abstract; you want to impress the committee as much as you can.

### Writing educational objectives/learning outcomes

Many conferences are focused on the learning of attendees and each presentation may need a set of objectives/learning outcomes that reflect what the delegates will learn. You may be asked for these in the abstract, but they are essential for the presentation itself. Telling delegates the purpose of your presentation is an important part of engaging them in learning from you.

These can be an important part of any conference paper presentation as you can set the scene for what attendees can expect to gain from your presentation. This is an area of your proposed paper that requires careful thought and attention. It is not merely a tick box exercise, but your outcomes should hold valid educational, academic and professional merit. You should consider what the attendee is able to do or learn as a result of attending your presentation.

Learning outcomes must contain an action verb to describe the knowledge and skills which demonstrates the delegates learning and information about the context to demonstrate the learning. This may be an observable outcome such as behaviour, performance or understanding but it must be explicit as to how knowledge or understanding will be demonstrated.

There is some excellent advice online about writing learning objectives/outcomes. Educators developed and use a hierarchy of cognitive learning outcomes based on their complexity and derived from ideas in Bloom's taxonomy (1956), named after its creator. It describes how one can build upon former learning to make more complex levels of understanding. Bloom lists six ways you can demonstrate cognitive learning, through knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Thinking about these can help with writing effective learning outcomes.

Each of Bloom's levels has a range of verbs that describe action at that level of complexity and is a useful tool for verb selection. Table 2 shows some of Bloom's verbs that you may find useful and Table 3 shows a revised taxonomy.

### Preparing for a conference as delegate or presenter

There is advised background preparation for you in both roles.

You should take note of the advanced information about the conference programme and consider who is presenting, attending or exhibiting at the conference. Check out their professional background, experience and expertise in their role and field. You may wish to read work they have previously published or presented as this helps you prepare and consider carefully which sessions you might attend at conference and what interaction with a question and answer session you might confidently participate in.

When attending sessions, you should take notes and keep handouts for reference. On your return to work, share what you have learned with colleagues so multiple people benefit from the conference. This is part of the professional responsibility you have as a delegate to disseminate your learning for others to develop and is often a condition of conference attendance funding. Attending a conference is an activity of learning and sharing that is a useful exercise in demonstrating continuing professional development using reflection for your revalidation portfolio with the Nursing & Midwifery Council (UK) (The Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2019).

If you have your abstract accepted and are preparing to present then you will have to gather your thoughts, consider the research findings, complete your paper, design your poster and prepare at length to be a good presenter. There is excellent online advice about preparing and making presentations from. Your preparation should involve rehearsing your presentation on several occasions to judge timings and general vocal tone. This is a good way to be sure you are confident in your

**Table 3**  
Revised Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001).

Remembering	Recognising, listing, describing, identifying, retrieving, naming, finding
Understanding	Interpreting, summarising, paraphrasing, classifying, comparing, explaining
Applying	Implementing, carrying out, using
Analysing	Comparing, organising, deconstructing, outlining, structuring, interpreting
Evaluating	Checking, hypothesising, critiquing, experimenting, testing, monitoring
Creating	Designing, planning, inventing, making

presentation and get your message across well. You could practice with colleagues and ask them to pose questions to you so that you might prepare some potential responses.

Once at the venue, you should seek out the Chairperson or Moderator for your session and ensure you are familiar with any equipment being used although the Chairperson will be present to oversee these things along with audio-visual staff from the venue. You should have a back up to your presentation with some written script, just in case of equipment failure. Do remember though that the conference organisers are there to assist and reassure you, not to put you under pressure.

Companies who make products or equipment often display their products and services at conferences and you should try to take time to meet them and learn more about their products and services; you may even pick up some free pens, highlighters, sticky notes and samples of their goods. Don't agree to any workplace visits or purchase promises if this is not within your jurisdiction in your role. However, you may wish to take their business card and discuss things further with your workplace line manager or share your business card with them, if appropriate.

Networking can occur formally during conference sessions such as poster and oral presentations but also socially during refreshment and meal breaks or even during a formal conference dinner or other events. It has been known that a wonderful idea for a project was scribbled on the back of a paper napkin during such networking opportunities! Using these opportunities to develop a network of colleagues is almost as important as the presentations you attend.

Conferences often provide an enthusiastic, motivating vibe that gives you a 'buzz' to consider initiating projects or changes on your return to work. You should take advantage of any free time at conference to note and list any ideas whilst fresh and before daily work interferes; this will enable you to harness and maximise this wonderful feeling of confidence and vision.

Finally, out with of conference times, you may delight in the opportunity to explore a new city as conferences are often held in major areas to encourage attendance and tourism. Tourism information is

usually included in the conference brochure and the organisers may also organise group trips to visit places of interest.

## Conclusion

Healthcare professionals are recognising the opportunity and desire to present at conferences. This does result in a competitive plethora of abstract submissions with a variable standard. In order to make your proposal stand out and have a chance of selection you must adhere to the conference organiser's guidelines in all categories to ensure you match their aims and objectives for the event. To enhance your opportunity of being accepted to present you should maintain clarity of the topic, relevance to the audience, and demonstrate an innovative and credible content to your work that will inspire others to learn more.

To find professional successful in your career, you may wish to reflect on these words of Florence Nightingale (1820–1910), *“Let us never consider ourselves finished .... we must be learning all of our lives; Nursing is a progressive art such that to stand still is to go backwards”*. REF.

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