FROM CONCEPT TO CRITICAL DISCUSSION

A Toolkit for Preparing the Best Conference Abstracts, Presentations & Posters

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written by **John Miller** on behalf of the
Coalition on Children Affected by AIDS

www.ccaba.org
contact: john.miller@ccaba.org

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Children
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AIDS

This toolkit is for people working in the HIV/AIDS field and others considering attending AIDS 2010, the International AIDS Conference in Vienna (July 18-23, 2010). This third edition was revised based on the feedback of those who used versions 1 & 2 in preparation for AIDS 2006 in Toronto and AIDS 2008 in Mexico City.

It is designed to help you:

1 Develop a presentation that goes beyond the description of your work or research;

2 Write an abstract that is clear, concise and interesting enough to a) be accepted by the conference and b) entice people to come to your presentation; AND

3 Prepare for and deliver a presentation or poster that will be informative and also stimulate discussion.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR THE XVIIITH INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE (AIDS 2010):

Dates for abstract submission: check the AIDS 2010 website: http://www.aids2010.org.

Track Titles:

Track A*: Basic Science & Track B*: Clinical Science
Track C: Epidemiology and Prevention Science
Track D: Psychosocial and Behavioural Science
Track E: Operations Research, Economics, Care and Systems Strengthening
Track F: Policy, Law, Human Rights and Political Science

*Note: Approximately 10-15 abstract-driven session slots will be awarded to each of the six tracks; however, Tracks A and B will have only one committee responsible for the selection and development of basic and clinical science sessions. Therefore, while there are six tracks, there will only be 5 track committees.

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What's my idea, and is it good enough?

Think about your presentation first—before writing your conference abstract.
Starting with the presentation may seem obvious, if you're a program manager or community worker. However, if you're a researcher or academic, you probably have a paper or report of your findings. **Because the abstract you will submit is for a conference *presentation* (oral or poster), and not a publication**, the abstract should reflect that. The conference selection committee will want to know about your research, but may also want to know what is your presentation idea; how it will go beyond your paper or your research findings.

How Presentations/Posters are Selected:
Conference abstracts are generally selected in three steps:

1) Computers sort the abstracts according to the sub-track under which it was submitted, or by keywords. The abstracts are 'blinded' (they remove the person's name or other identifying information).

2) The abstract are sent to volunteer abstract reviewers, who are generally your peers, chosen by the conference committee. These reviewers are given guidelines and receive between 10 to 30 abstracts. They review these in their own offices, sometimes scoring them using an on-line tool. For the International AIDS Conference, two reviewers review every abstract, at this stage of the process.

3) Once a short list is created, the conference committee gathers for a 'marathon meeting' during which they have to both select abstracts and build the final program, all within a one-to-two day period. The pressure is intense and there are many competing agendas.

Scoring is often based on questions such as:

- How valuable will this topic be to this conference?
- Does it link to the theme of this conference?
- Does the work appear to be of a high standard?
- How clearly is it written?
- Is a new idea or new research being presented?

4) Each conference has its own guidelines, but for the International AIDS Conference, abstracts are chosen for either a) an oral presentation, b) a poster presentations (talking beside your poster at an appointed time), c) a poster (you can stand beside the poster and answer questions while it is on display), or d) on CD-ROM (the abstract will not be displayed at all during the conference but will appear on the CD-ROM given to delegates). Finally, the abstract might be rejected outright.

So… what is your presentation idea, and is it good enough?

Does the scenario below sound familiar?

- ⚕ "I'm proud of my work (my research)."

- ⚕ "It's two days before the deadline. If I can find an hour or so to write and send off an abstract, it might get accepted. If I'm funded to attend the conference, then I'll prepare a presentation (hopefully not on the plane) that will tell others about our important work."

- ⚕ "I work in difficult circumstances, with poor funding. This conference would be a great place to recharge my batteries."

- ⚕ "Once I'm there, I can hear what else is going on, get new ideas and make contacts that will help me carry on with my work."

Multiply the above scenario times thousands of delegates, and it's the recipe for a dull and frustrating conference.

Why? Because everyone is looking to the next person to give inspiration. These kinds of sessions have received complaints from many previous conference delegates—so many, in fact, that conference organizing committees are looking for different kinds of presentations.

The best learning

Think about your best conference learning situations They probably weren't when you heard detailed facts or figures or a sad tale without ideas for solutions, or even when you learned of a breakthrough. *All of that you could have learned by reading about it.*

We learn best when we are inspired, or when we are challenged to find solutions. In the case of research projects, we learn best when a presentation is followed by discussion of the broader implications of the research findings, or the next steps or when the most important information is distilled for us from a mountain of complicated research results.

If we are presenters, **we learn best when we begin with a high-level critique our own work and then receive the support and advice we need to improve.** It happens when there is critical, creative, supportive dialogue.

What does 'interesting' mean?

Whether you're a researcher, academic, policy or program manager, community worker or activist, this toolkit challenges you to aim for a more interesting presentation of your work.

You're a policy or program manager, community worker or activist and you are proud of your work. Great, but…

By all means describe it – do so in enough detail to get your abstract accepted. But what might make your work stand out is if you indicate to the conference selection committee (and then later tell the conference delegates) **how do you think your work might be transferable to other situations, and why.**

Scientists know that sometimes we learn the most from an experiment that proved their hypothesis wrong. Program managers are less anxious to talk about so-called failures. But **the conference selection committee will also want to hear about programs or policies that were tried, but encountered difficulties or even failed, and what lessons were learned.**

Although you wouldn't go into detail in an abstract, **you should be thinking of how you would explain your challenges, or how you could be improving.** If your abstract is accepted and you make a presentation at the conference, you might ask delegates for input or feedback or advice.

You're a scientist, researcher or academic and you have top-notch research findings to report. Terrific, but…

Although you must follow certain conventions in writing your abstract, you can **go beyond the findings or evaluation results.** You must provide sufficient details to establish the rigor of your study. But also indicate that you'll **discuss the broader implications**—both positive and negative—of your findings. **Indicate which debates or questions you might raise.**

Conceptual checklist

When conceiving of your presentation, use the following checklist:

☐ **Am I saying anything new?** If not, why am I submitting an abstract? (Note: there may be times that building on existing research is important, such as when there is an anti-scientific/moralistic backlash against scientific evidence that saves lives).

☐ **Is there a challenging and provocative question** my work brings up that can be posed during a presentation, one that will start a good discussion?

☐ **Can I think of one or two things that are relevant not only to my own colleagues, but to an inter-disciplinary audience,** or people from other regions, countries, continents?

☐ **Have I thought of my smartest, most competent or most informed colleague?** Have I considered what I could say that would interest that person? Can't think of anything? Call the person and ask him or her what discussion, related to your work, would be interesting.

Policy/ program managers and analysts, community workers, activists should also ask themselves:

☐ **Can I briefly state what is best about my work, and also its biggest weakness/biggest challenges?** Can I describe my challenges in a way that doesn't leave me feeling ashamed of my work, or vulnerable to funders who may come to my presentation?

Scientists, academics, researchers should also ask themselves:

☐ **Could I clearly speak to the broader implications** of my research and can I find a way to summarize them in my abstract?

Writing the abstract

Once you have your idea and have thought through how your presentation could be made engaging, you have to write your abstract.

Who is your audience?

Your primary audience for the conference abstract is the conference review committee. The conference delegates -- to whom you will actually deliver your presentation -- are your secondary audience.

The abstract should be written keeping both in mind.

Purposes of your abstract

An abstract submitted to a conference typically serves these main goals:

- **It can be your ticket to attending the conference:** It's the only document reviewers have, and your abstract will be blinded (your name and organization removed) so that they can't make a decision based on your reputation. The abstract, and the work on which it is based, have to stand on their own.

- **It summarizes your key contributions:** It helps readers (reviewers and delegates) understand what is new and different or transferable about your work.

- **If your abstract is accepted, it becomes the advertisement for your session:** Delegates are overwhelmed with choices of sessions at conferences. Your abstract must tell them why they should choose your presentation over another one that is happening in the same time slot. This is important: there is no other opportunity to change your abstract, once accepted, before it is published in the conference program.

We suggest eight steps to writing and submitting an abstract:
1) Decide if your topic will be an empirical study (based on research findings), or if it will be issue, program or policy-driven;
2) Find the Track and sub-Track that best fits the topic (these are published by the conference).
3) Summarize your topic in a concise title
4) Write the body of the abstract. For the International AIDS Conference, there are four sections:
   - i) The Background or Issue statement
   - ii) The Methods or Description statement
   - iii) The Results or Lessons Learned statement
   - iv) The Conclusions or Next Steps statement
5) Write the Teaser statement
6) Get writing and editing help!
7) Test the strength of your abstract against the final checklist in this section
8) Submit the abstract using the system indicated by the conference

Step 1:
Find your category/ track (and sub-category)

Each conference organizing committee divides the field into categories or tracks, and sometimes sub-categories or sub-tracks. This is done so that professionals can be organized to best evaluate the work of their peers and, it is hoped, select the best conference program.

For the International AIDS Conference, there are 6 categories or tracks, and each of these has sub-categories. The list of the six tracks is on page 1 of this document. For the sub-categories, visit www.aids2010.org.

Your work or research may not fit easily into the categories chosen by the conference.

If this is the case, you can either:
a) use the network of your peers to choose the category to which you will all submit–this will help the organizers group together similar projects or research ; or
b) choose a category according to who you want to reach with your presentation.

Step 2:
Empirical or issue/ program/ policy-driven?

There are essentially two kinds of abstracts:
1) Option 1: empirically-based (based on formal research findings); and
2) Option 2: issue / program-based

Most people know where they fall, but **some people may have a choice.**

For instance, if your program was evaluated for client satisfaction, but the most important issue for you is ethics, or how to increase participation, then presenting the client satisfaction results (which would be an empirical abstract) may not be the best idea. You may decide to prepare an issue-based abstract instead.

Step 3:
Choose a descriptive title

Getting your title right can be key to writing a clear abstract, and so it should be the first thing you write.

A clear, well-crafted title is harder to write than most people think. Here are some things to remember:

Your title needs to **help the reviewers categorize your presentation.**

Your title is your mini-advertisement. As people skim through a thick abstract book, a clear title can be like a life raft in middle of the ocean.

Your title should be descriptive and simple, but not too brief. For instance:

Being bland is okay, as long as you describe the topic. For instance, "Children, challenges, changes" is cute, but it doesn't tell us which children, which challenges, or which changes.

Don't worry about being bland. You need to describe the topic. "Youth Recreation Centre" is an example of an abstract title that doesn't tell enough. "Lives of Youth Improved by Network of Recreation Centres in Andhra Pradesh, India" tells us more.

Don't be so clever that your title is hard to understand. For instance, "Children, challenges, changes" is cute, but it doesn't tell us *which* children, *which* challenges, or which changes.

Think of including 3 things in the title —
1) "What you learned." – the idea, the finding, learning or the result of the experiment.
2) "What you did." – the experiment or project (what you did).
3) "Where it happened." – the setting (not necessary if it's a Basic Science abstract).

Bad Example #1: "Making efforts to increase home based care in a rural community" We don't know where, what efforts, who made the efforts.

Good Example #1: "Lives of Youth Improved by Network of Recreation Centres in Andhra Pradesh, India"

The Finding/ learning: "Lives of youth improved"
The Experiment/ project: "Network of Recreation Centres"
The Setting: "Andhra Pradesh, India"

Good Example #2: "Monitoring and evaluating clowning and street theatre-based HIV/AIDS education in Rural Guatemala: guidelines for impact and process evaluations."

The Finding/ learning: "guidelines for impact and process evaluations"
The Experiment/ project: "Monitoring and evaluating clowning and street theatre-based HIV/AIDS education"
The Setting: "Rural Guatemala"

Step 4 (i):
The 'Background' or 'Issue' Statement

The Background or Issue Statement
The first section in the Scientific abstract is the "Background Statement". In the Issue or Program-based abstract, the first section is the "Issue Statement"

What you write here should briefly answer the following questions:
1) "Why do we do our work?"
2) "What is/ are the specific problem(s) that motivated us?"

3) Scientific abstracts: Has previous work in the area been reviewed?
In other words, what's the problem you're trying to address? "AIDS is a scourge" is too broad and obvious – be very specific: "In the last five years, data has shown a rise in mother-to child transmission in the shantytowns outside of Accra, Ghana."

Examples of fuzzy (unclear) and clear issues or background statements:

Fuzzy/unclear:

"Combating AIDS means facing many challenges, social, political, cultural and epidemiological. HIV prevalence is extremely high among intravenous drug users. IDU's face many obstacles, including discrimination based on drug use, and laws making intravenous drug use illegal. One of the greatest obstacles to evaluate and monitor prevention interventions in IDUs is the difficulty in approaching them. This is because of the drug's use is illegal and clandestine, and IDUs mistrust researchers. Researchers have tried many strategies without success, working with community-based organizations, etc. It is still difficult to establish an adequate sample size that could be repeated for a behaviour analysis study. "

The problems with this statement are the following:

• There's too much information. Too many problems are brought into it. The sentences are long-winded.
• We don't know where this study was done.
• It doesn't cut to the heart of the problem.
• It is 102 words –this is 1/3 of the permitted words (the international AIDS Conference permits 300 words for the whole abstract).

A clearer statement would be:

"In Mexico, researchers face great difficulty in gaining access to a sample size of IDUs that is large enough for a comparative behaviour analysis study. Laws forcing IDUs to be clandestine and mistrustful have thwarted several outreach efforts."

Step 4 (ii):
The 'Methods' or 'Description' Statement

The Methods or Description Statement

In this statement, you should be answering, in brief statements, the questions: "Who did what, when, with how many, where?" & also "*How* did we do it?"

For Option 1 (Scientific) abstracts:
- This is where you describe your methodology.
- Who were the people and what is their context?   How many projects, centres, children, adults, groups, areas, trainers, households, etc. e.g. "This project is carried out in 5 villages (population xxxx). It involves 320 families indirectly, and 48 families directly…"
- What was the rate of inclusion (how many in the study in relation to the whole group)? All of the participants? A selection of them? Which selection?
- How were the participants or samples chosen?
- If there has been an evaluation, report its methods, statistics and results.
- If qualitative methodology has been used, report it. Mere observation isn't qualitative methodology.

For Option 2 (Issue/ Program-based) abstracts:
- You have to describe how you solved the problem (or tried to solve it) that was described in the Issue statement.

Be careful to ask yourself if you have the right level of detail. Issue-based abstracts often fall into the trap of going into far too much detail. Scientists, on the other hand, have to prove that their research methods were sound and rigorous.

Step 4 (iii):
The 'Results' or 'Lessons Learned' Statement

The Results or Lessons Learned Statement

In this statement, you should be answering the questions: "What happened, & What did we learn?"

This statement should be about what has already happened, what was already done, not about the future (a statement about the future comes with the final section in the abstract).

Option 1 (Scientific) abstracts, describe the following:
- When the experiment was completed, was the hypothesis proved or disproved?
- Summarize the key research results
- What challenges were there in this experiment?

For Option 2 (Issue/ Program-based) abstracts, describe the following:
- What did you do well?
- What went wrong and how have you changed your approach because of it?

Step 4 (iv):
The 'Conclusions' or 'Next Steps' Statement.

The Conclusions or Next Steps Statement

In this section, you should be answering the question: "What impact or implications does my work have?" (Conclusions), or "What will we do next?" (Next Steps)

The statement should point the reader to the future, by stating:

For Option 1 (Scientific) abstracts:
- What does it all mean for future research/ for human beings?
- Forget about the obvious conclusions; tell us something we don't already know or wouldn't necessarily figure out for ourselves.

For Option 2 (Issue/ Program-based) abstracts:
- What is transferable - what does it all mean for people in other regions/ countries/ cultures?
- Where do you go from here to improve your work or your program or to develop your idea? Avoid meaningless statements such as "more work needs to be done."

Step 5:
The Teaser

The 'Teaser'

Once your abstract is accepted, it becomes your only advertisement for you oral or poster presentation. It is recommended that you have a sentence in your conference abstract that entices the reader to attend your presentation.

This sentence can go in either the Results/ Lessons Learned statement or the Conclusions/ Next Steps statement. You can choose based on what makes the most sense.

Some examples include:

"This presentation will elaborate on lessons learned."
"The implications of these results on the broader research agenda will discussed."
"This presentation will discuss the particular experimental challenges and how they were overcome."
"Key debates and controversies will be outlined and dealt with."

Abstract Summary Chart

The Abstract Summary Chart

Questions you can ask yourself to prepare for writing your abstract:	Option 1: Scientific abstract	Option 2: Issue or program-based abstract
Why this topic/ experiment? What are the problems that motivated your work?	Background statement	Issue statement
How much detail is too much detail?	Methods statement	Description statement
What did you learn?	Results statement	Lessons Learned statement
What does it all mean for human beings? What is transferable? Where do you go from here to improve your work or your program or to develop your idea? Forget the obvious conclusions and statements.	Conclusions statement	Next Steps statement
What's my "teaser" – how will I hook the abstract reviewers, and entice people to come to hear me speak.	Either the Results or the Conclusion statement	Either the Lessons Learned or the Next Steps statement

Step 6: Get writing and editing help!

Get Writing and Editing Help!

Some of the most brilliant people are poor writers. If you are one of these brilliant people, then you should not be ashamed to get help. Otherwise, none of the advice in this toolkit will help your abstract get accepted.

Find a good writer (not necessarily an academic – they can be the most confusing writers of all!) – someone who can help you translate your ideas to the page.

The best writers have editors.

Find a good editor – or two. One editor should look at your abstract in terms of clarity, and to see if you have met all the criteria. The other should make sure that your sentence structure, grammar, and spelling are perfect. If you can find one person with both skills, you are in luck. If you are writing your abstract in a language other than English, and then having it translated, find a third person to proof-read the English and make sure it is well-translated.

Here are some other tips:

๏ Writing your main points in bullet form will help you limit what you are saying (don't make the bullets paragraphs as they sometimes are in this document–just one sentence each and preferably a clear and short one). Later, join the bullets using linking words, clauses or sentences.

๏ Ask yourself: how can **I describe my work/research** but also **clearly state the objectives of the presentation**?

๏ Be brief, summarize, and **only say the essentials.** A conference abstract should be no more than approximately ten sentences in length. Is all of the information critical or can I pare it down even more? (Option 1 Scientific abstract writers: don't cut out key data!)

๏ Think about your **target audience: who are they**?

๏ Make sure you say **who, what, when, where and how.**

๏ Realize that, in many cases, computer database programs will be scanning the words in your abstract and sorting them for a person sitting at a computer. So…try to **make your abstract understandable to both computers as well as impatient human beings.**

Make sure your abstract reads easily, with each sentence flowing into the next.

In the final draft, bullets or numbers should only be used for lists, and only if space permits. Remember that this is only an abstract; use a clear, direct writing style.

Step 7:
The final checklist

Submit your abstract to the following checklist

☐ Without over-simplifying the language, **could people from other fields of study understand it**?

☐ Researchers: Does it give a sense that **someone will get more from the presentation than from just reading the research paper?**

☐ Is it **clear and concise**? Does the content of each section match the guidelines in this document?

☐ **Have acronyms been explained**? (Don't go overboard. You don't have to spell out 'AIDS')

☐ Is there **too much introductory material / material that sets the context**?

☐ Has someone checked it over to ensure it is **free of grammatical errors, spelling errors and awkward sentence structure, and that it is factually correct**?

☐ Are the conference's **word limit and other guidelines absolutely respected**?

Step 8:
Submit the abstract using the system indicated by the conference

Most conferences now require you to submit your abstract using an on-line submission system, and increasingly, this system uses software that has you filling out a form on a series of web-pages.

The technology that conferences purchase often counts the number of words typed, and does not allow you to go over the word-limit.

Although the system may vary, the steps usually involve:

1) Creating a profile. The profile can be for someone other than the abstract author, for instance a secretary or research assistant who will complete the form online.
2) Creating and saving a new draft for your abstract. Often you can work on it online, save it, and go back to it later. However, it is recommended that you draft the text separately, so that you don't lose the text if the system goes down or is over-loaded.
3) Choosing your option (Option 1 – scientific, or Option 2 – Program/Issue-based)
4) Selecting the category for the abstract, a cross-cutting theme it fits into (if there is one – the conference will explain what these themes are).
5) Filling in the title. The words in the title do not count towards the word count of the abstract.
6) Fill in the text. The words in the abstract headings are in addition to the maximum word count. For instance, in an Option 1 abstract, "Background, Methods, Results, Conclusions" are four words. Your total word count will therefore be 304 instead of 300.
7) Enter the principle author, and if there is a study group.
8) Add any charts or graphs online, where they permit you to do so.
9) When finished, and you have reviewed your draft, click "Submit"

Preparing your presentation

You've been accepted, you've received funding to attend the conference (we can always dream). Now what?

First of all, don't rest on your laurels. Your abstract was accepted, but you now have to write a compelling presentation. If you don't take the same care you took when you wrote your abstract, you can easily turn a great abstract into a terrible, dull conference presentation.

To avoid this, follow these 4 Golden Rules to drafting conference presentations:
Reverse, Re-allocate, Remove and Re-write.

The 4 Golden Rules of Conference Presentations

Rule # 1: Reverse

Rule # 1: Reverse the order of your presentation so that you begin with the end.

A normal presentation usually starts with a description, and then ends with a conclusion.

Instead, begin with your conclusions, lessons learned and next steps, move to context-setting (description), then go back to lessons learned and next steps (the second time you do this section will be in greater detail). This helps people to know where your presentation is going, and by doing so, you are reminding everyone, including yourself, that the lessons learned and next steps are the most important section.

Beginning and ending with the conclusions, lessons learned, and next steps is repetitive, but repetition is effective. There is a saying about presentations that goes: "Tell them what you're going to say, then say it, then tell them what you said."

Rule # 2: Reallocate

Rule # 2: Re-allocate the number of slides you devote to each section, by changing the proportions of description to analysis.

Instead of 90% of slides on the research design/ project description and 10% of slides on lessons learned/ results/ outcomes/ next steps, how about a different proportion -- for instance, 35% on the research design/ project description and 65% on lessons learned/ results/ outcomes/ next steps.

A good rule of thumb is to begin with 2 slides summarizing conclusions or lessons learned, then 7 slides on research design/ project description, then 11 slides on lessons learned and next steps.

Rule # 3: Remove excessive detail, data and bragging.

After writing your first draft, go through your presentation and remove any details that people will likely not remember.

Think of what kind of data and information you can give in a handout, or on a web-page instead of in your presentation.

Are you just bragging about your program? Keep it to a minimum. Be humble and focus on your challenges and lessons learned.

Don't load up your slides with too many pictures –presentations based on abstracts are generally only 10 to 15 minutes.

Rule # 4: Re-write and edit your presentation.

We've said this before. If this document is sounding repetitive, it is because we cannot emphasize this step enough. Edit, re-write, edit, re-write. Find editors who will be very critical (your boss? a funder? both?)

Most importantly, plan ahead to build in time for this step.

Other helpful hints when preparing your presentation:

❧ **Imagine that your smartest and most informed colleague will be in the room** – maybe it's your boss or your funder. They already know what you do and they've read your reports. You must present information that they know, but you don't want to bore them. Also, they know your project or research can be critiqued, so don't avoid the issue, thinking you'll impress them. What ideas, questions, concepts, issues, or debates can you raise that will make your presentation engaging to that person?

There is a way to demonstrate excellence in your work and show pride in it, while having a critical analysis, and without jeopardizing your funding.

❧ **Use accessible language.** If you are presenting in English, consider that there may be people attending your presentation who don't speak English as a first language. Simultaneous translation

services won't be available in smaller sessions. Additionally, they may not know all of your jargon and acronyms.   Prepare your presentation for an inter-disciplinary, international audience, *but don't talk down to them either.*

✞ **Think of what people remember most**: stories, ideas, one or two surprising facts. **Think of what people remember less well**: detailed information, numbers, dates. Researchers can't avoid presenting data – the data is important. **The trick is knowing how much of it to present, and what to focus on**.

✞ **Find out who is on your panel and what they are speaking about. If possible, contact the presenters** to find ways to make your presentations complementary.

✞ **Bring handouts of detailed information** that isn't in your presentation.

✞ **Flashy presentations can distract people from your message**. Use visual aids carefully.

Most common pitfalls:

1) Flashy graphics.
While your audience wonders how you made those words in your PowerPoint presentation fly in from all four corners of the screen, **they aren't listening to what you're saying**. Or, they're thinking, "She said she's overworked. How busy can she be if she has time to prepare all these theatrical gimmicks?"

2) Wordy slides/ too many slides.
The point of an overhead/ PowerPoint slide is to give headings that you will talk about. It helps people locate themselves in your presentation if their mind wanders, or they've come in late.   They should be listening to you, not reading ahead. **A rule of thumb is 1-2 slides per minute of presentation.**

3) Using graphs and charts
You should use them sparingly if at all. People won't be able to see anything but a curved upward or downward line. A chart contains too much information and the type will be too small to read.

See the Reference & Resources page (at the end) for additional tools on the effective use of Microsoft PowerPoint or other presentation software.

- **Respect the time limit!**   There is nothing more frustrating than going to a session where the presenters go on so long that there's no time at the end for discussion. **When presenters go overtime, they appear disrespectful, egotistical, unprepared, or all of the above.** Meaningful learning opportunities are lost. So… Time yourself.   Think about how you'd cut your presentation short if something unforeseen eats up your time.

- **Deal with nervousness head on.** Practice your presentation in front of co-workers (practicing in front of the mirror isn't very helpful except for timing, or taping yourself to hear how you sound). Get feedback.   DON'T imagine people naked – you will either be amused, distracted, or disturbed!   DON'T start with a joke or a story unless it is related to your presentation, very short, and guaranteed to deliver the intended effect. Remember that humour is cultural and so your joke might fall flat if delivered to an international audience.

- And finally, **get an editor to look over your presentation** (yes, we said it one more time!)**.**
Your supervisor, or a funder is a
good choice. The presentation is the culmination of all your work – get someone to look it over well before you stand at the podium. Ask them for feedback.

Preparing your poster:
helpful hints

In terms of content, the same principles apply to creating a poster as they do to preparing an oral presentation (so read the section above).

Also:

- **Don't overload the poster** with information.
- For additional detail, **bring enough handouts** for people to pick up (place them next to the poster and check twice a day). Or, you can give a web link or an email address where people can contact you to learn more.
- Basic design/ layout principles are:

    1) Keep white space to the sides–group text and images in the centre.

    2) Use different colour and fonts to make certain parts of the poster stand out. Use a large font size. If you have to begin reducing font size, you probably are cramming too much information onto your poster—put it in your handout.

3) "Serif" fonts lead the eye across and should be used for the body of the text (a serif is a hook on the end of a letter). This font—Times New Roman—is a serif font. "Sans serif" fonts lead the eye down and should be used for headings, unless the heading is to the side as in this document. This font— Verdana—is sans serif.

4) Studies show that "justifying" your text (this mean lining up the type) on both the left and right side of a paragraph makes it harder to read, even though it looks 'cleaner'. Line up your text on the left ("flush left"), and make it jagged on the right. This paragraph is flush left and jagged right. For instance, in Microsoft Word 2002, highlight your text, then select from the Format menu "Paragraph", then on the Indents and Spacing tab, under the General section, choose "Left" where it says "Alignment".

See the Reference & Resources page (at the end) for additional tools on preparing poster presentation.

Looking for learning, Looking to engage

You've been accepted, you've prepared ahead of time (not on the airplane!) and you're about to give your presentation.   What more can you do?

Thinking on your feet

Good preparation takes you 90 percent of the way. The other 10 percent happens in the room itself.

Most presentations are given as part of a panel. We hope and expect that they will be grouped together thematically. Delegates may be attending the session because of the theme of the session, or to hear someone else's presentation.

It should be your goal to **engage delegates in your work and your ideas**.
It should be your goal to **connect your work to the other presentations**.

Listen to the presenters going ahead of you. Listen to those who go after.
Try to think of how you'll pick up on what they've said, or on the questions they've posed. If you're too nervous to adapt your presentation on the spot, then think of connecting your work to that of your other presenters during the question and answer section.

Keep to the time limit, make your missed points later

Bring your wristwatch and place it on the table in front of you.

Again: If you go overtime, you're either egotistical, disrespectful or disorganized. None of these reputations helps you get your message across.

If your presentation is reaching your time limit, wrap up quickly. You can pick up the points you missed during question period. **If you go over time, your audience will tune out or leave in frustration or anger.**

Make it interactive, if possible

Consider it your job to ensure that the session is interactive.

You have a presentation to make and you must make it. But you will also have **come prepared with questions for the delegates, with the issues you are grappling with**, the debates you feel are topical.

If there is time for questions, make sure the facilitator picks up on your discussion questions. If he or she does not, repeat yourself; ask the question/ raise the issue again. You can **direct your comments to your fellow panelists, or to the delegates themselves**.

Be strategic in how you frame controversial questions. You want to engage the audience or your fellow panelists in a helpful debate. You don't want to pick a fight.

When your presentation is over

Try to **think of ways that the discussion might continue after the session is over** (it's unlikely you'll solve everything in an hour-long session). Bring business cards to hand out. Offer to stay afterwards to answer other questions. Publicize an on-line forum or upcoming conference.

Finally, Take a deep breath, relax, and go and learn from others!

References   **Cox, Pamela L., Bobrowski, Paula E. & Maher, Larry.** "Teaching first year business students to summarize : abstract writing assignment (my favorite assignment)." *Business Communication Quarterly,* Dec. 2003 v66 i4 p36(19)

Cremmins, Edward T. The Art of Abstracting. 2nd edition. Philadelphia: Information Resources Press. 1996

Magic Lantern Video Collection "Read, write & research, part 8 - Writing for the social sciences – The abstract." 1991

Maughan, R. "Returning to the writing of abstracts" (editorial). Journal of Sports Sciences, July 2004 v22 i7 p603(1).

McLeod, Judith, "Writing abstracts" (web page) 1998 The Write Place – St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, Minnesota, – http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/bizwrite/abstracts.html. Web page downloaded August 17 2005

Morrow Hall, Deanna, "Writing abstracts: The American National Standard, *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science.,* Oct-Nov 1986 v13 p35 (1)

Patrick, Peter.   "Writing conference abstracts". Notes for the 2003 university course LG554 of the University of Essex.   Posted online at http://courses.essex.ac.uk/LG/LG554/WritingAbstracts.html. Downloaded June 9 2005, last updated November 19 2003.

PowerPoint

The following are some online resources on the effective use of Microsoft PowerPoint or other presentation software:

Advice from a website called "Everything2.com":
http://www.everything2.com/index.pl?node_id=1134342

PowerPoint Tools and Technology
http://blog.lasermice.com/

Presenting with PowerPoint: 10 dos and don'ts
http://www.microsoft.com/smallbusiness/resources/technology/business-software/
presenting-with-powerpoint-10-dos-and-donts.aspx#PresentingwithPowerPointdosanddonts

Poster Presentations

At the time of drafting this toolkit, the following resources were found on the internet (if none of these is still available, type "poster presentation" (in quotes) into your internet search engine, and see what you find):

An online tutorial posted by the University of Kansas Medical Center
http://www.ccaba.org/resources.html (This interactive tool has generously been made available by Jeff Radel of the University of Kansas Medical Centre)

A poster preparation guide posted by the University of Newcastle upon Tyne school of Chemical Engineering:
http://lorien.ncl.ac.uk/ming/Dept/Tips/present/posters.htm
(also available offline, as an electronic PDF file, readable by Adobe Acrobat software).

An online tutorial posted by George Mason University Writing Centre
http://www.gmu.edu/departments/writingcenter/ppt/