



British Columbia Chapter

Canadian Evaluation Society

Abstract Writing - Tips and FAQs

Based on a workshop delivered by Beth Snow ahead of the 2023 CESBC Annual Conference

These Tips and FAQs were developed to support evaluators in preparing an abstract for submission to the CESBC Annual Conference. This document supplements the guidelines on submitting an abstract.

Submission Process

Make sure you are aware of the deadlines for submission as well as what information you need to provide during the submission process.

- The conference is split into conference streams and you will need to find out (and justify) which stream your proposal fits with.
- Use the words in the streams in your abstract! Makes it easy for a reviewer to see how it links to the conference stream.

Top Tip: Read and follow the abstract submission instructions. Do everything outlined in the instructions and make it easy for the reviewer to see that you have done this!

Planning Your Presentation or Topic

- Remember that the audience is evaluators! Go beyond just presenting the findings of an evaluation and think about the questions and challenges that will really engage the audience (e.g., how you applied an evaluation tool in an interesting way).
- Titles are important! People will read and decide if they want to come to your presentation based on the title.
- Making your session as engaging as possible is important as this allows for both questions as well as a practical component to showcase the topic you are talking about.
- As evaluators we are starting to realize that we need to talk more about values, worldviews and reflexivity. How can you contribute to this discussion and how evaluators can engage in these things?

Top Tip: Go beyond evaluation results - think about methods, their application, challenges encountered, ethical questions...

- Think broadly about those issues that are becoming more and more important in evaluation discussions, such as ethical dilemmas and challenges.
- Try to make your abstract relevant to the CES competencies to help make your presentation practical and useful. The competencies are the things and dispositions evaluators need to be competent at evaluation. You can directly make the connection to the competency you're referencing (e.g., "this relates to Competency 2.1 because...").

Presentation Types and Styles

The Conference offers the option of submitting abstracts for different lengths and types of presentations found in the abstract submission page on the CESBC Website.

- A panel can be quite large or substantial, often around three people talking about a topic, with one person acting as a host or chair
- A workshop is focused on teaching the participants a skill – so the expectation is that they have the opportunity to do the thing that you're teaching in the workshop (i.e. it should be highly interactive)
- World Cafe is a specific method that involves lots of opportunity for people to interact. See here for details:
 - <http://theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>)

Assessment criteria

- The assessment criteria are listed in the call for proposals.
- When you're writing your abstract, keep the assessment criteria in mind.
- Go through everything you have written and make sure your presentation meets all of the criteria and answers all of the questions.
- It can be helpful to ask someone else such as a colleague to review and make sure your presentation meets the criteria.

FAQs

- 1. As a student or emerging evaluator who is new to the field - how can I decide on, or focus on, a topic that will be interesting and relevant to the field? (i.e., we may have experiences in a niche subject that's different and interesting when brought forward with an evaluation lens; reading journals or abstracts from national conferences could help)**

Talk with colleagues, mentors etc. and discuss your ideas - chatting with people can help build ideas and ways to approach them, so do bounce ideas off colleagues.

- 2. Could you provide examples of some common types of presentations that people use at evaluation conferences? (i.e., are they experiences from the field? Best practices? Lessons Learned? New research methods? Advocacy-based? etc.)**

The types of presentations can often be lessons learned, how someone overcame specific challenges, or a new tool that they are applying to evaluation (e.g., one year there was a presentation on how someone was using Trello to manage evaluation projects)

- 3. Do you have suggestions for phrasing abstracts in a way that's coherent to evaluation work? (i.e., is there preferred language, areas of interest - like the CE Competencies for example)**

Be clear, simple, and avoid using jargon. Some presenters like to include jargon or to have it sound more academic, so for selection it depends on who the reviewers are (which we don't know in advance). When it comes to the actual presentation, of course you need to be mindful of the audience. If you can write and present in plain language, that's better.

- 4. Who reviews the abstracts? What type of evaluation experience do reviewers have?**

We usually put out a call to the evaluation community for volunteers for reviewers, so the reviewers are practicing evaluators. Two members of the committee will review each abstract and then the whole committee meets to decide which proposals to accept. Feedback is often given if the reviewers feel that there is area for improvement or clarification.

- 5. Do we need to be 100% finished with our research or evaluation project in order to submit an abstract about it? What are the constraints or expectations around to what extent the work or research has been done?**

Ideally, the project is completed and you know what you're going to talk about, but you can put in a proposal for something you are working on and expect to be done (or that you have done enough of to have something to talk about by the time of the conference). You should have enough of a sense of what you're going to talk about to write an abstract. Don't let not being done prevent you from submitting an abstract.

6. How formal or informal should my abstract or bio be? Can I write them in first person, or should they be in third person?

Whilst we encourage a variety of styles, we would encourage you to look at previous years' conference programmes to consider whether the styles used in those abstracts and bios represent your own style. We are aware that different disciplines may approach writing styles and the use of first or third person differently, and that in some sectors it is more common to be formal whilst in others a more informal tone is used. We are fostering an inclusive atmosphere at the conference, so that we invite abstract submissions in a variety of styles and approaches that suit your own personal, professional and technical style.

7. How can I engage the audience?

There are different ways in which you can engage the audience, across the different presentation approaches we are accepting this year. In some types of presentations, Q&As might be more appropriate; whilst in others you might want to engage the participants in case studies or practical exercises. This will depend largely on your own professional and personal preference and/or approach. Participants' engagement also doesn't just have to be at the end of the session - you could start the session by asking the participants to contribute their own experience, for instance.

8. Do I need to submit an abstract alone or can we submit a collaborative abstract / session?

We encourage teams to come together to present, particularly in teams where you engage not only with the topic at hand but also with the topic of collaboration and team dynamics particularly if you are co-presenting with funders, community partners or others who may share and offer different perspectives about evaluation work.