**[How to Write a Conference Proposal](http://ncptw2015.org/2015/02/19/how-to-write-a-conference-proposal/)**

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If you’re new to submitting a proposal for a conference, here are a few pointers on writing your proposal. The NCPTW proposal form includes two fields that require written descriptions: the proposal proper, which is a brief  (max. 500-word) summary of what your presentation, workshop, or panel is about, and an abstract, an even briefer (max. 75-word) description that can be included in the conference program.

Despite the different terminology, both of these fields in essence ask for abstracts. Here’s a guide by Philip Koopman on writing abstracts that’s an oldie but a goodie. It’s more geared toward the sciences, but I like how it suggests starting with the motivation for the research and the problem that it addresses: [http://www.ece.cmu.edu/~koopman/essays/abstract.html](http://www.ece.cmu.edu/%7Ekoopman/essays/abstract.html). (If you’d like to present the results of your own quantitative or qualitative research in or about the writing center, the format suggested in this guide may actually be right on target for you.)

**When I write abstracts, I generally think of starting with a statement of what is at issue** (what people **aren’t** talking about or a hole in the current research), make my own argument in a nutshell touching on key points of reasoning, and then end with a “so-what” statement of how this research will move the field forward or add to our understanding. Notice the focus is balanced between simply summarizing your presentation and demonstrating why it matters and what it adds to the disciplinary discussion.

To that end, **think about conducting some research, if you haven’t already, to see what others have said on your topic and determine how your own presentation fits into that larger discussion.** Some ideas that may be new to you (for example, that nondirective consulting methods produce more learning than directive ones) have in fact been discussed (and discussed, and discussed) for four decades. Other writing center practitioners are going to want to know how what you have to say on the subject connects with what others have said and are saying now.

Here’s an abstract of an article I recently wrote, which I’ve tweaked as if it were for a conference paper. I’ve added numbers (not included in a real abstract) to call out the “moves” I’m making below:

**The Categories We Keep:  
Writing Center Forms and the Topoi of Writing**

(1) Rather than being mundane artifacts of daily practice, writing center forms reveal our fundamental assumptions about writing. Particularly instructive are forms that categorize writing into a series of checkboxes. (2) Analysis of such forms from twenty-two writing centers demonstrates a disciplinary consensus about which aspects of writing are most salient and the pedagogies that underlie them. (3) Seen as examples of Aristotle’s *topoi,* these checkbox categories play an important role in passing expert-defined concepts of writing on to writing tutors and the writers they serve.  (4) Examining the categories on these forms as disciplinary *topoi* underscores their important role in helping tutors and developing writers conceptualize writing and suggests that we must approach even the most seemingly trivial artifacts of our practice with pedagogical care.

Here I (1) state my topic and suggest why it matters, (2) mention my methods for studying this topic, (3) indicate the theory I’m using to analyze my findings and state my main argument, and (4) provide more “so what” to show readers why my work matters.

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