The Writer's Workshop

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A Guide to Writing Conference Reviews

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Since there is usually a professional interest linked to attending conferences, writing a conference review should be a relatively simple and enjoyable task. The following guide will hopefully inspire you to write a dynamic conference review simply by being prepared in advance, and using your observational skills to collect some interesting information that can be shared and enjoyed by those who read your review.

Preparation

Prepare the outline of your proposed review in advance by viewing the conference program, which is usually downloadable from the conference website, or by obtaining a full program from the conference organisers closer to the time of the conference. Take note of key speakers, international guest speakers, underlying theme(s) of the conference, and other additional features that may be of interest to both you and your reading audience. Additional features may include poster presentations, pre-conference and conference workshops, and demonstrations of innovative or emerging products and technologies.

Decide on which oral presentations are of most interest to you and try to obtain further information from the speakers you would like to include in your review, by talking to them during session breaks at the conference (should the opportunity arise), or by email following the conference.

If available, ask the conference organisers to provide you with details of who has publishing rights to the conference abstracts and consider submitting your review to the same publisher.

At the Conference

Question time is usually a good indicator of the level to which the audience is engaged with the topic and the speaker. Observation at this stage can provide you with differing points of view to fill out your key topics, and provide further scope to discuss the

emergence of ideas and future trends within the area of research. Take notes of any key issues which may arise from the presentation, and/or other points that you feel have enhanced the research, or have made an impact on the audience. Do be aware however, not to make unqualified critical statements that will reflect negatively on any individual, group or organisation regarding their research, views or particular style of presentation.

Most conferences have poster presentations or displays, which can provide an excellent source of current research and future networking opportunities. Presenters are usually available for discussion at specific times, or during session breaks throughout the conference. However, if discussion time is limited, try to obtain the handout version of posters that are of most interest to you, as they will provide a synopsis of the research for further reading in your spare time. The handout should also provide contact details of contributing authors, together with their professional and organisational affiliations should you wish to obtain further information or permission to include contributions of their work in your review.

Observe commercial displays at a convenient time, and take note of new products or technologies that are emerging in your field or discipline. While it is advisable to avoid using brand names if you intend to submit your review to a peer reviewed journal, it is acceptable to describe products in ways that are assisting or advancing progress in a particular field or discipline. Vendors generally have product literature which can assist you with this.

Writing your review

As with other types of journal publications, always adhere to the word limit and Author Guidelines of the journal to which you intend to submit your review. Be concise in your expression by remembering that your information must be sufficiently compelling to hold your reader's interest, while avoiding for example, too much discussion about the beauty of the conference location, the excellent work of the organisers or the conference social events. While it may be tempting to share your appreciation of those points, try to limit your comments to observations of the research content and innovative ideas drawn from the conference.

Prepare a draft summary with your objectives or key areas of discussion either contained within appropriate headings or in order of logical sequence, throughout your text.

Introduction (100 -150 words)

Provide a short background history of the organisation responsible for hosting the conference, a brief demographic of the conference delegates and the audience to whom the conference was addressed (National or International and profession). Also include the geographical location of the conference, countries and professional organisations that were represented, number of delegates who attended, key themes, and duration of the conference.

Filling in the white space (300 - 500 words)

Describe the most interesting or compelling presentations of the conference and explain why you found them interesting or compelling. This should involve a brief discussion about the relevance and content of your chosen presentations to a particular discipline and/or sub-discipline, by expanding with your own knowledge of the topic and introducing parallel views and comparative views of other presentations and/or discussions at the conference.

Draw on the key points of research, expanding on their significance to the intended field or discipline in terms of advancement, innovation and where the research is heading in future. Make comparisons to previous research in the area and make use of new ideas which may have emerged during question time.

If available, use references or links where appropriate, to provide readers with further information about the research. It may also be of value to provide publication details for the conference abstracts in your review, if permissible.

Conclusion (100 – 200 words)

Conclude your review by summarising your overall impression of the conference, the benefits gained from attending, and if available, the location and contact details of next year's conference. Acknowledge the source of any grants, or organisational funding, which enabled your attendance at the conference.

Checklist

Before you submit your conference review, remember to check the following:

- Is the word count within the journal's recommended limit?
- Are the headings/subheadings appropriate to each section?
- Have you achieved your intended objectives?
- Grammar and spelling – ask someone to proof read your paper after running a spell checker and proof reading it yourself.
- Acronyms – Always define the full acronym when it first appears in your paper (e.g. "USA" should read "United States of America") and avoid overuse of acronyms.
- Referencing – Always use the style of referencing recommended by the journal you are submitting to. If in doubt, check current publications in your chosen journal. Check any electronic links and double check the accuracy and availability of your references.

In addition to the above guide, it is always a good idea to check other conference reviews previously published in the journal that you intend to submit to.

If you would like to submit a conference review to the Journal of Emergency Primary Health Care, please contact the Managing Editor, Rhona Macdonald by email: rhona.macdonald@med.monash.edu.au or by telephone: +61 3 9904 4198.

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