HOW TO GET YOUR CONVENTION PROPOSAL ACCEPTED FOR AECT '92

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That time of year is almost here again. The submission deadline for AECT 1992 convention proposals is April 12. Most of us have experience writing term papers, research papers, articles, and/or a dissertation or thesis. But as many of us have discovered, it is a different matter to condense our research findings and ideas into a 750-1000 word abstract.

Yet, it is on the basis of such an abstract that the acceptability of our work will be judged for presentation at AECT's annual convention. In this article, we offer some suggestions for readers who may be writing their first proposal as well as for those who have submitted proposals in the past. Hopefully, these suggestions will help you obtain a higher rating and thus acceptance of your proposal.

The AECT convention offers its members a choice of four different session formats:

- Concurrent sessions are approximately 75 minutes long and typically consist of two or more similar papers grouped together.
- Showcase sessions are 20-minute paper sessions devoted to a single paper. Showcase sessions are well-suited to first time presenters.
- Research papers are reports of research studies employing quantitative and/or qualitative research methodologies. These sessions usually include the grouping of three to four similar papers with a discussant.
- Fee-paid workshops are usually one-half or full day workshops that focus on professional development opportunities or a special event.

Convention proposals and abstracts fall into two basic categories. The first type is the the reporting of research results. The second type is the non-research type such as an analytical paper, literature review, or a report on a project. (We chose the term “non-research” to represent the several categories of proposals that do not report original data.) We will focus on how to write the 750 to 1000 word abstract for each category which can be submitted for any of the four session types.

Regardless of the proposal type, the key idea is to determine what information to include in the proposal and how to present it to gain the interest of the reviewers and convince them that your project is worthy of acceptance. Follow these simple but important steps:

1. Obtain the 1992 Call for Participation and official proposal forms. The 1991 Orlando convention program and this issue of TechTrends include the five-page document. Copies can also be obtained from the AECT headquarters office. Complete the forms exactly as directed.
3. Prepare and submit all requested materials such as a proposal cover sheet and co-author(s) addresses.
4. Include seven collated sets (original plus six copies) of information. Each set must contain the Proposal Form, Equipment Request Form, and a separate 750 to 1000 word abstract as well as a short description of your presentation in 50 words or less for promotional use.

Failure to do these simple things will start the review with an immediate negative impression. Reviewers might think, “If this individual was sloppy in preparing this proposal, how careful was he or she in doing the original project. And how much time will he or she spend preparing the presentation?”

Consider who will review your proposal. Most proposals are reviewed by individuals (usually three) who are knowledgeable about instructional technology but may not necessarily be an expert in your specific topic. Try to place yourself in their position and think of what is needed to make your proposal interesting and understandable. Provide adequate background information and explanations. Also, selecting a timely and relevant topic enhances your chances for acceptance. With this general plan in mind, let’s take a closer look at each type of proposal.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

A proposal reporting the results of your research should follow a format similar to a paper you would submit to a journal such as Educational Technology Research & Development (ETR&D). Generally, this format includes an introduction, method-
Introduction

The first sentence of the proposal should be a precise statement concerning the nature of the problem written in terms your reviewer can understand. For example, while preparing a proposal for a research study we have conducted on text density, we realized that the term "text density" would not describe the nature of our research, which was concerned with the design of computer-based instruction. Thus, our introductory sentence focused on the problem of designing computer-based instruction. The sentence reads, "A critical process in developing lessons for computer-based instruction is to determine the manner in which information will be displayed on the screen."

This sentence focused the reviewers' attention on two thoughts: designing computer-based instruction and how information is displayed on a computer screen. The remainder of the paragraph briefly summarized the related literature, defined key variables (e.g., "text density"), explained the experimental conditions, and identified the specific research questions addressed by the study. Again, you need to be precise when presenting the key points of the study by focusing on what the reviewer needs to know.

Methods and Data Sources

This paragraph is for summarizing your research methods and the materials used in your data collection.
- Begin with a sentence describing the subjects—how many and who they were.
- Describe your experimental design, independent variables (treatment) and dependent (outcome) variables, and your method of assigning individuals to the various treatments.
- Describe the materials and briefly discuss any special techniques you used.
- Describe the sequence of steps involved in an experimental session and specify the types of data collected. Here is an example from one of our proposals: "At the beginning of each lesson, the learner-control group selected between high- and low-density text, while other groups received standard materials. At lesson completion, subjects were administered an attitude survey and an achievement posttest, followed three weeks later by a delayed retention test."

This section was about three pages in the full paper but was reduced to two sentences in the proposal to explain the primary events. Since you are limited to 1000 words, you must carefully summarize your methods and data sources in terms that will adequately convey your study.

Results

The results section is a summary of findings that are important to your study and/or which can contribute to the field's body of literature. Typically, this section should be brief and to the point, indicating what the analyses revealed in relation to your hypotheses or research questions. After reading the results, the reviewer should be anticipating your interpretation of those results in the next section.

Discussion and Implications

Rather than merely summarizing your proposal, we suggest that you title the last section "Educational Implications" or "Discussion." In past proposals, we have used this section to interpret or explain the results of the study and to compare them to those of prior studies. We proceed to discuss the educational (or practical) implications of the research by exploring ways an instructional technologist (or teacher) can apply the results to an actual project (or lesson). Finally, we end the proposal with suggestions for future research to indicate how the present study might spur additional investigations on related variables.

Non-Research Proposals

Non-research proposals can take many different forms including a literature review, analytical paper, description of new methods, or a progress report for a project. Superficially, writing such proposals may appear to be a rather simple task compared to a research proposal. However, we have found that the opposite is often the case as there does not appear to be a generally accepted format for the non-research proposal. After reviewing proposals of this nature, we have identified three parts that seem to be fundamental.

Introduction

The first paragraph of the proposal should introduce the topic and state both its relevance and importance to your audience. You should then support your introductory statements with related literature and additional background information on the project. Again, you will need to consider the reviewers' perspective and include what they need to know about the topic.