

Transcript

□ **Laura Jeffrey** started transcription



Laura Jeffrey 0:07

Hi, welcome to this recording of how to write an abstract specifically for the Wolfson research event.

My name is Laura Jeffrey and I'm the Librarian here at Wolfson.

We're going to be talking a little bit, first of all, about what the Wolfson Research Event is.

So it is an annual interdisciplinary conference.

It takes place every year run by students.

So there is a student committee who are currently organising the Wolfson research event and it is specifically for Wolfson students to give a presentation of their research.

That's everybody from undergraduates right through to PhD students.

It's a really fantastic opportunity to learn from your peers, find out what they're doing.

It's very rare to be able to go along to a conference.

It is plain completely different to your own.

So we would really encourage you to come along to the Wolfram Research event, but also to submit an abstract which will be unpacking a bit more today. It takes place in May next year, in early May, over two days. Lots of people don't attend for both days, but.

They come along to see a few sessions and this is your opportunity to think about how to sell your particular talk so that you get lots of people coming to see you.

It's a combination of oral and poster presentations, the oral presentations.

Normally there are slides to accompany them, and the poster presentations. If you haven't done one before, is your opportunity to put together in a visual form your research and then you have the opportunity to talk to that research during some of our networking sessions.

But we will support you in this if this is the first time that you've given either type of presentation and that's really what sits behind the Walton Research event. It's very much for people who this is your developing your research career.

This is a really safe space in which to communicate your ideas to a non-specialist audience.

As it's often quite nice that you feel like the expert on it before, you might go off to a disciplinary conference.

So the call for abstracts. It's quite short. The abstract that we're looking for just 250 words. That's only six to seven sentences.

So you have to really pack quite a lot in there, and that's a real skill to be able to kind of communicate what it is you're working on and why it's really important to other people to hear about it.

We also asked for some keywords, and whenever you've read a general article, you'll know that within a database or just underneath the abstract on apdf, you'll see keywords and these are words that will speak to a really broad range of people.

They're often not specialist words, but you know, if you're writing about education experiences at university, a word like higher education, you would expect to see in your keywords.

So think about what those words are and again why they might draw people to your particular paper.

So as we've already said this, this conference is interdisciplinary.

You will get a talk on, you know, coming from classics. Next one from economics, next one from physics, followed by one from music.

They will be really, really broad.

So think about the people who are in your audience.

Make your language really inclusive. If you think about how you describe your research to a friend or a family member.

Who knows nothing about what it is that you do think about?

You know, putting some of that language into your abstract.

At the same time, we want to be confident that you know what it is you're talking about.

So it's a really careful balance between using specialist language, but also making that understandable to a really broad range of people. And then as we said, there's two different types of presentation and you'll just need to elect which one you would like to be considered for or if.

You're not bothered then just put in an open application.

We always get more applications for oral presentations, so if you're not successful and we offer you a poster, I'd really encourage you to take up the offer.

It's a really nice chance to do something a bit different.

We pay to get the poster printed.

And you get to take it away with you. So it's a really nice memento.

I think it's helpful just to reiterate the selection criteria which you would have had in the e-mail that's gone out about.

Submitting an abstract again, this just kind of reiterates stuff that we've said already, but make sure that it's suitable for the audience.

Don't recycle an abstract that you've already submitted to another conference or something.

A talk that you've been doing within your department.

The selection criteria are there because we were going to have again really interdisciplinary selection panels.

So rather than just it going out to lots of single reviewers, there'll be a group of people around the table who will be from different disciplines.

My fellows, but there will be research students, possibly master students and undergraduates, on those panels as well.

We want your work to be original.

We don't just want this to be a kind of literature review or summary of work that other people have done.

Tell us about your research.

What's really exciting?

What is it that you're kind of pushing forward and the kind of original nature of what it is that you're doing?

Tell us a story, you know, don't just describe it.

Make sure that you kind of cover all the different elements of the research process. In that story.

But this is something we're really going to delve that into a little bit more detail into in a moment. And then finally, just take a little bit of time to proofread before you submit that present that abstract to us.

Obviously the odd Eric is absolutely fine, but make sure it's the right word count as well.

It's really frustrating for the editorial team if they get really long wordy abstracts, so try and stick to that limit.

So when we're talking about an abstract, I guess it's helpful just to kind of clarify what it is.

We mean it's not a summary.

It's not just a slow summary, a kind of straight summary of what you're doing.

This is your opportunity to sell what it is you're doing.

As you'll know, if you've ever been to a conference, there are quite often parallel sessions.

That's not the case at the walls and research event, but you are still competing for people's time and attention. As we mentioned at the start, not everybody will just come and sit through a whole 2 day. So we want your abstract to sound exciting.

We want people to make the effort to come and see your particular talk, Ron, someone else is.

There's a couple of key elements that we want you to include in there.

There might be a little bit of background information.

There might be your kind of key research questions, particularly the start of the research process. If you're a bit further on, you might want to tell us about some of your findings in there as well, and the impact.

I think that's a really exciting bit that kind of.

So what I'm doing all this research, but why does it really matter?

And you might want to think of that as telling a story. You've only got six or seven sentences, so it's quite difficult to do that. But I think it's helpful to have some kind of structure to hang those ideas off.

So there's quite a few works out there who talk about storytelling or narrative in the abstract form, and somebody I wanted to draw is Randy Olsens work: Houston, we have a narrative.

And Randy Olson was a scientist, but also a filmmaker.

So brings kind of expertise in the Academy as well as specifically in kind of storytelling as well. And as a model the and but and therefore model the ABT model.

So this idea that there's momentum, so something happened and then something else happened. It moves the story on.

And then there's this idea of conflict.

Kind of. What is the challenge that you're facing?

What? Why are you even researchers in the first place?

That must be a kind of unresolved element to the research area that you're working in, and then this resolution and all good stories have something happening at the end.

How is this resolved?

That's the kind of, therefore element. So this gives you a structure to abstract to bear that in.

And also ultimately you can extrapolate that out to a presentation.

You're going to have 10 minutes. You're going to have a little bit longer than you will in your 250 words, but still the idea of moving through a story rather than just piling a detail on top of detail on top of detail.

So, for example, we're going to unpack.

An abstract that's been provided that we have for a particular journal article.

And this would be a way to kind of distill that down into summarise that are that abstract.

The idea that PhD students are highly trained members of society and they have a lot to offer the workforce. So we've got two kind of statements there that we've joined together. Then we've got the element of conflict, the kind of issue, the kind of grind that wears that.

Friction. Why do I need to carry out some research?

But they have trouble finding jobs that are suitable outside academia.

And this question of resolution like where does my research come in?

Therefore, we created a machine learning algorithm that can find jobs for them.

So that's a really, really super short.

Summary of an abstract that already exists out there that I've just put into this model, this ABT model.

So now it's your opportunity to do that.

Perhaps take a few minutes.

You can pause this recording and think about the story that you want to tell about your research.

So make a statement, then add a bit of momentum.

Put another clause in there.

Join it together with the word and then think about what the problem is that you're trying to solve through your research.

Put the button and then the second says. That's just one sentence, and then the second sentence is going to be the resolution kind of. Where does your research come in?

So if you pause a recording, take.

Minutes to try and do that.

This isn't going to provide you with a full abstract, but it's going to give you that idea

of distilling down the real, the kind of core essence of what it is that you're working on.

OK.

So that's one model.

Another is this idea of padding out the story. So we've got kind of the really, really kind of the essence of what it is that you're doing now.

We're going to expand it and there's six ways in which to do that.

So this is based on the work of Inga Ruben and there's a link in the further information at the very end of this presentation.

And you can follow up on that.

And her work looks abstract in this way.

First of all that you want to put some context you want to locate your research. Then you want to provide a little bit of focus within that kind of broader picture then the anchor.

So what is the kind of specific lens or research method that you're using?

Report on what's happened.

Argue for the knowledge that you created and then explain the significance, significance and that's the impact of your research.

So it's very much along the lines of those few sentences we had in our criteria, but this is quite a nice scaffolding structure.

To work on.

So Inger gives a few ridiculous examples.

She's made-up some completely crazy fictional, fantastical research that is going to create our abstract at the end.

So you'll have to excuse that, but I think these are quite helpful still just to kind of see how she's doing that from different disciplines as well. And so I think this model is again useful because it can work from a STEM perspective or from humanities or social.

Science.

Perspective as well. So first of all.

We're going to locate our research and you will have noticed with those six bullet points that gives us our six sentences. So one sentence per element of the structure.

So first of all, yeah, you're going to be responding to a much broader debate.

You haven't just come at your research from nowhere, unlike maybe this research of Inger's that she's made-up.

But there will be an existing corpus of material out there that you will have read. You will have engaged with and possibly you spotted it or gap in so, but for now. Telling people what's the big discourse is going on here.

The next thing you want to do is focus in.

We talked about a really, really broad picture there.

There's going to be research that's potentially taking place over decades, if not centuries, in your particular field.

You're going to have to narrow that down.

This is the kind of funnel approach, isn't it?

That we need to think about, and we need to get everybody really quickly because we've only got 6 sentences.

So the second sentence is going to say exactly whereabouts do you fit within this zooming right in?

I quite like that idea.

You might have a research question that you can pose to the audience.

When you're talking for 10 minutes, you could use a structure to kind of explore sub questions as well, but just it could be a really really quick statement. As you can see, even in this stem one, it's a really, really short sentence.

They need to kind of think about the anchor, what's kind of underpinning the way that you're going to be interrogating this particular research question?

Because lots of people could approach it from loads of different angles.

What's the lens that you're applying to it?

So it might be a really specific methodology that you're using.

It might be a qualitative quantitative.

You might be able to drill down within that depending on where you are in your research process.

And then what are your findings? And as I said, not everyone is going to have findings.

So perhaps having if you don't have any findings, this might be a sentence to kind of explain where you are in the process. But I think yeah, it's quite nice in a way for people to know where the story's going, as they say here, you know this.

You're not in a reality TV show or another way to think of it.

It's not a murder mystery.

You don't want some great surprise at the end of your talk.

You're meant to lay it out for them, and more often than not, if your findings are

useful and interesting or surprising or wrong, whatever it is that's going to add a little bit more tension into that storyline that we were talking about.

And.

And then are you able to answer those research questions that you have or do you have a clear argument or is something emerging from your preliminary research that's actually going to take your research in a perhaps slightly different direction depending on what it is that you found out?

Thus far.

And then finally, yeah, why does it matter at all?

Why is it important to the people sitting in the audience that you're doing this research? So this could be the impact of the research that you're making.

It could be possible further research that you want to carry out as a result of this, you might be posing additional research questions for other practitioners or academics to pick up. But yeah, I think that idea actually, if there are any policy implications or practitioner.

Uses for your research.

This might be a nice time to introduce that idea as well.

So this gives you the sense that there's like a tiny text as a way of condensing down everything. It is that you're working on, particularly if you're in the later stages of your PhD research and you're looking towards having eighty to 100,000 words you're trying to.

Bring all that down into just seven sentences.

It's it's difficult. You're trying to get like the absolute kind of the power of what it is that you're talking about rather than trying to just summarise kind of slightly duller parts that may not be a particular interest to those in the audience.

But I think what it can do is putting in a little bit of thought now is going to help you in the long run. Now, of course, if you're at a masters level, you may not know what your research findings are going to be.

This is really early for us to be asking for those sorts of things, so it might be that you just kind of minimise some of the impact at the end of that story and you kind of flesh out the core of it. You know, where you think this?

Is going or you might want to set it in a little bit more context at the start.

Kind of where the emphasis lies may not be entirely equal depending on where you are in the process.

But ultimately what we want to get across is wiser research unique.

So as I said, I've I took an abstract that was written by Inger Mewburn just because we're using this isn't something that she's provided.

I went off and searched for an article that she'd written with some co-authors, and that's what I was distilling down into that ABT model and but and therefore model and this is the abstract as it appears with the journal article.

And there's the reference below there.

So this was a language model that they were producing in order to help.

PhD students find jobs, particularly outside.

The Academy.

So that's what it looks like.

I then tried to apply the ABT model to it and you can see that actually in those first few sentences, that is something that she has done. As I said, this is these two models aren't aligned at all.

This is me mapping. You know, overlaying one model onto this abstract so they make a statement. They don't use the word and, but then they go on to say this is happening.

And this is happening as well.

There have been calls to more closely align the curriculum with ease of industry, and then there's that friction, but there's not enough evidence.

So that's that's why this research is taking place.

That is the gap that they identified that meant it was worthwhile doing some research and ultimately producing this paper.

So this is where the therefore comes in.

Therefore, we need to find better ways to understand what they want from graduates.

Again, they don't use the word therefore, but you can easily see that little narrative structure in those first three sentences.

Then go on to provide a little bit more information.

So what I thought would be useful is to then overlay that other model on top.

So they locate, so we've got the ABT in the first few sentences and then they go on to first of all locate their research.

So what's happening at the moment? The focus?

What this particular paper will be doing? You know, in this paper the machine learning model will be used.

The method, the model that they developed was driven by SVM.

They then go on to report some of the findings.

The results showed that and then the significance our model offers a new perspective to look at PhD level job skill requirements.

So that's kind of where this is going.

This is kind of the changes that this research is making, so they have essentially followed, you know, their own advice, which is good.

So what?

I'd like you to do now again, is to pause this recording and to have a go.

You could write out the subheadings of locate, focus, anchor, report, argue, explain.

See if you can do that for your research. If you can't, as I said, you might want to think about the kind of shape of your abstract and where you have got more information.

But as we said, we don't just want this essentially to be a literature review.

So try and think about where your research might be going.

You'll be pleased to know that if your abstract is accepted, we will give you the opportunity to revise it.

So that will probably be around Easter time.

We'll be looking to put together.

The final program, but we will give you an opportunity to change that. So if your research moves on quite significantly.

Next term, you will have the opportunity to include that. So for now, think about grabbing that review panel with a kind of really interesting story to tell.

OK, so that is one sort of scaffold that you could use.

There are lots and lots of other templates out there, but I think it's a good way of making something engaging, particularly when you haven't got disciplinary language or you can't make assumptions about the knowledge of your audience and your reviewers.

But there's other ways to do it as well, and one that I found that's available online that's free to use is called to write abstracts, and this gives you a little bit of structure.

Rather than just drafting something kind of from a blank page, it lets you create almost like a questionnaire with a series of building blocks that you can drag.

Into yeah, a series of questions that you then answer and those answers then hopefully formulate an initial abstract, which of course you're going to need to revise.

You're going to need to make sure it meets our criteria, but it might just help you

with that structure if this is something that is new to you, so it breaks it down into planning.

So again, it uses these words things like narrative construct, a narrative for your abstract.

You can then check the flow and that's something that's really important. OK.

It's only 6 sentences, but you don't it to jump around too much.

You will then have these kind of questions that you can answer, so make sure it makes sense.

Then actually do some writing and then as it says, it's really important that you edit that.

But I'd recommend having a look.

It's quite a novel way of approaching.

A task which is quite pressured.

The amount of words we've given you.

OK. Then we also just want to cover quickly the idea of keywords. As I mentioned at the start, this is how you might describe your research in just five words. And I think the best way to think about what words you want to use for your abstract is.

To kind of work backwards and think if I'm searching for some literature in my field for my gestation, for my thesis, what does my search string look like?

Which keywords have I identified?

They're important in my research question.

That I would then go off and input into Google scholarly scholar, or to Scopus or web as science or international bibliography or social science is or j-stor.

Or I discover how am I going to get research out?

So you need to think of words that are well used and well known in order to get a nice high hit rate.

So you can think about what keywords would be used for the abstract that we've just read, like I said.

You could put educate higher education in there.

I would probably put out things about graduate employability.

I might specifically want to mention PhD students.

We're not just talking about undergraduates. We're specifically talking about people with doctoral degree.

Seem to be very much in a kind of emphasis on skills development. You know, in the workplace we might want to get that in there.

How people design curriculum in order to make it applicable for those who want to leave academia.

And then of course, the model that they were actually using this large language model, artificial intelligence All might want to get that in there as well. Now, of course, if I put something big in like AI that's going to bring people to this article that might have very.

Very different interests.

There might be computer scientists.

They might be interested in the model that was developed, but they may not.

So it's that combination of keywords that's also really, really important that you need to think about.

So again, this is an opportunity for you to pause the recording and to go off and do a little bit of preparation for writing your abstract. Perhaps go to web of science.

That's a particularly good one that highlights the keywords in the results that you get rather than having to click through to the journal itself.

But if you're from the arts, you might not find so many relevant resources in there.

So go to the A-Z database listing that's available through Cambridge Library.

So when you're on, I discover there's just a link at the top to A-Z database listing.

Search for something in your area.

And then you can see highlighted you know the words that are cropping up that are relevant to your particular field.

And you can see the bottom the author keywords, the ones that I put in, I put in PhD higher education employability.

They're highlighted in yellow, but it might flag up other words as well that you haven't thought about, including. In this case doctoral training.

Maybe you're on skills development and keywords, plus that's something that is kind of AI that's within the database.

It's something that is pulling out and drawing.

Similarities between articles that share content or specific references and looking at their keywords and applying them as well.

Hey and that's the end of the presentation. If you've got any questions, then please do e-mail me. My e-mail is librarian@wolfson.cam.ac.uk or you can e-mail the wre committee as well. If there's anything you're not sure about in terms of writing.

Or abstract.

Just make sure to check e-mail for the deadline for that abstract submission.
Otherwise, good luck with the process.

● **Laura Jeffrey** stopped transcription