Guidance Note on Writing a Strong Abstract

Submitting an abstract to the 16th World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion (Safety 2026)

What's an abstract?

An abstract is a concise summary of the major elements of your research or project. It also serves as your audience's first encounter with your work. Though brief, an abstract is expected to provide a complete description of your work, covering the problem and relevant background, objectives, methods used, major findings, and conclusions. A strong abstract tells a short and complete story, succinctly covering why the work was needed, how the results were obtained and validated, what you learned, and why it matters. Within a 100-300-word limit (per conference guidelines), an abstract must be understandable on its own and accessible by a diverse audience ranging from experts to non-experts.

Two common abstract types (by content):

- *The descriptive abstract*, which summarizes the purpose and scope of the research or project but does not include detailed results or conclusions.
- *The informative abstract*, which summarizes the research or project by providing an overview of the background, methods, results, and conclusions.

This guidance note provides best practices for writing competitive and compelling abstracts for conference submission. You've done the hard work. Now you just need to persuade reviewers to see why it matters.

Why do abstracts matter?

With abstracts, first impressions are critical. Abstracts succinctly describe the essence of your research or project. Reviewers rely primarily on your abstract to decide acceptance. If accepted, your abstract is the only content conference participants will read, influencing whether they will attend your presentation.

Essential components of a strong abstract

A strong abstract quickly tells your audience why the research or project was needed (the problem you're addressing), how it was conducted with sufficient rigor to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, what you learned, and why it matters (answering the ever-important question: So what?).

Depending on conference guidelines, abstracts are submitted in two formats: structured or unstructured.

- **Structured** abstracts are organized under specific headings (e.g., Background, Methods, Results, Conclusions) that guide the reader through each component of the research or project. This format is more commonly used when submitting to scientific or technical conferences or journals.
- **Unstructured** abstracts are written as a single paragraph without section headings, providing a narrative summary of the research. This format is more commonly used for qualitative work, program descriptions, and narrative research.

Regardless of which format you use, the objective remains the same: to tell a clear story.

The Safety 2026 guidelines require a structured abstract, and the required sections are outlined below.

Title

Include a specific, detailed title that clearly conveys the question or issue you investigated in your research or project.

Background

Why did you do the work that directly led to the results?

- Focus your abstract on a specific **subsection** of a larger project.
- Keep the WHY focused on that subsection, especially if it is objective-driven.

Objectives

What does your work aim to do?

- Include only the objective(s) **relevant to the results** you will present.
- Frame your objective(s) in terms of action (e.g., to analyze, to assess), so readers quickly grasp the purpose of the work.

Methods

How did you obtain the results?

- The methods section **must support the results and conclusion.**
  - Demonstrate the **rigor of your methods** so readers can trust the validity of your results.
  - **Write with non-experts in mind.** What seems obvious to you may be unclear to others. Include the technical detail necessary to explain your approach, but balance it with plain language to avoid overwhelming or alienating some readers.

Results

What did you learn? What was the result of your work?

- Your results section is short, so **you must focus on two or three important findings.**
  - If you have three important findings, use only one or two for the abstract, and save the rest for the presentation.
- **Negative findings are okay!** (They can sometimes matter even more than positive findings.)
  - They still advance knowledge by highlighting which assumptions don't hold and which approaches don't work.

Conclusions

So what? Why does the work matter? What should people remember?

- Build your story around the main point you most want readers to remember, which may be the entire conclusion section.
- This point is your **single overriding communication objective (SOCO).**

Using these prompts will help you write an abstract that's clear, informative, engaging, and relevant to your audience.

Key writing elements

A strong abstract quickly tells your audience: **why the work (research, program, etc.) is needed, how it was conducted, what was learned, and why it matters.** The following writing strategies can help you address these questions thoroughly yet succinctly.

Use language that is **clear**, **objective**, and **brief**.

✗ *Every year, countless lives are lost in tragic road accidents, highlighting the urgent need for change.*

✓ *Road traffic injuries are a leading cause of death among individuals aged 15–29 worldwide.*

Use **active voice.**

✗ *[XYZ] was tested by the study.*

✓ *The study was tested [XYZ].*

Ensure content accurately reflects research—**don't overstate your findings**:

✗ *This intervention will eliminate drowning deaths worldwide.*

✓ *This intervention was associated with a reduction in fatalities in the study population.*

Vary the **tense**:

- **Present tense**
  - Problem/Background – Presents established knowledge
  - Objectives – Explains what your project aims to achieve
  - Conclusions – Presents interpretations or implications that are currently valid
- **Past tense**
  - Methods – Explains what you did
  - Results – Presents what you found

Apply the "**Four Cs,**" which ensures your abstract is:

- **Complete**, covering the major aspects of your research or project.
- **Concise**, eliminating unnecessary words and simplifying your sentences so your message doesn't get lost.
- **Clear**, using plain language and logically organizing the content.
- **Cohesive,** drawing connections to smoothly usher your reader to each subsequent point.

Writing your abstract: Step-by-step guidance

1. Assess the requirements of the abstract. Closely review abstract guidelines to determine the deadline, word limit, expected elements, acceptable formats (e.g., Microsoft Word) and languages, available research tracks, and submission types.
2. Review your research or project and think about what you want your readers to know. What sets your work apart? What is the main point of your work that you can't wait to share, or your SOCO? And why does it matter (the "so what?" element of your abstract)? Once you identify this, you can build your abstract around it.
3. Organize your thoughts. List bulleted information according to abstract components. You will gather more than you need during this step, which is okay (let it flow!). But be prepared to narrow the list down to the most essential information.
4. Tell your story. Convert bullets into 1-3 brief sentences per section (depending on the word limit). Don't worry if the first draft feels messy—that's normal.
5. When working within strict word limits, every word counts. Ensure each sentence or phrase conveys a clear, focused point. Start with a compelling and clear opening that will draw your readers in to learn more.
6. Cut unnecessary words. Remember, every word counts, so be intentional about each idea you are communicating.
7. Proofread! Run a spell check and manually read your abstract to check for any errors you might be overlooking. A helpful practice is using Microsoft Word's "Read Aloud" accessibility feature—let Word read the text aloud as you follow along to check that each word, phrase, and sentence is correct, complete, and makes sense.
8. Walk away. Literally, go for a walk. Do something else to give yourself time away from the draft. This will allow you to review each draft (there will be at least a few) with somewhat "fresh" eyes.

Review, revise, and submit

After you complete the first draft, it should undergo multiple rounds of review—by you, your co-authors, your peers, and/or your advisor. Because an abstract is expected to be understandable

to a broad audience, ask a colleague outside your field to review it. Feedback from different reviewers will help you catch important information gaps or content that needs more clarity.

1. Conduct a quality check by asking yourself:
    - Does the background clearly and adequately convey why this research is important and relevant?
    - Are methods specific enough but still concise?
    - Did I include the most important findings?
    - Are results concrete and quantified where possible?
    - Do the conclusions explain the “so what” without overstating the findings?
    - Is language plain, active, and within the word limit?
2. Share with your advisor and/or peers and ask for their feedback.
3. Make revisions according to feedback received.
4. Conduct another quality check using the 4 Cs and make any necessary final revisions.
5. Repeat the above process until you produce a draft you are satisfied with.
6. Proofread! You don’t want to risk receiving a lower score on your abstract due to minor, avoidable errors.
7. Submit your abstract with confidence!

Quick tips

Dos	***Don’ts***
• Strictly follow abstract guidelines. • State your problem clearly. • Emphasize the novelty of your work. • Focus on major findings and why they matter. • Use active voice. • Eliminate unnecessary words (no filler or fluff!).	• Don’t include detailed descriptions…but don’t be vague, either. • Don’t overuse unnecessary technical language or jargon. • Avoid using acronyms, but if needed, remember to introduce the full form first. • Don’t use hyperbolic statements or overstate your findings. • Don’t include information outside of your research.

Putting these principles to work

The goal of any abstract is to communicate your research clearly and convincingly. By centering your message on the why, how, what, and so what—and by applying the writing strategies recommended here—you can produce abstracts that are both informative and impactful. Use this guidance note as you draft and revise to ensure your abstract reflects the strength of your work.

About this guidance note

This guidance note was developed by Gilliane McShane, MID, with input from Charlotte Baker, DrPH, MPH, Dennis Mazingi, DPhil, and reviewers involved in the Safety 2026 abstract process.

Appendices

I. Safety 2026 Abstract Submission Guidelines

The deadline for abstract submissions is 31 January 2026 - Please ensure that your abstract is submitted before the deadline, as late submissions will not be considered.
Guidance for submission of Oral and Poster abstracts.

- Abstracts should be max 300 words.
- Abstracts should be structured and include the following sections: background, objectives, methods, results, conclusions. For the co-design section, please include the description of how you engaged with communities, decision makers or other interest holders in your research.
- Draft your abstract in text format in MS Word or a similar programme and copy and paste. Arial font size ten is advised.
- Please submit your abstract in English. However, it is possible to present in French as translation services will be available. This can be arranged once the abstract is accepted.
- No graphic images, tables, graphs, or columns should be submitted with your abstract/presentation.

You will be able to submit the following abstracts:

- **Research-based Presentations (oral or poster):** Please select the posteroption if you do not want to be considered for an oral presentation (Oral presentations are typically between 10 – 15 minutes).
- **Best Practice/Implementation Presentations (oral or poster):** Please select the poster option if you do not want to be considered for an oral presentation (Oral presentations are typically between 10 - 15 minutes).
- **Pecha Kucha style (oral):** Rapid-fire oral presentations. Pecha Kucha (Japanese for “chit-chat”) is a fast-paced, visually driven presentation format designed to keep talks concise, lively, and engaging. In this style, each presenter shows 20 slides for 20 seconds each, resulting in a total presentation time of 6 minutes and 40 seconds. The slides advance automatically, forcing speakers to stay focused and tell their story with clarity and rhythm rather than reading text-heavy slides. It’s often used in conferences to showcase multiple ideas or projects in a short session, encouraging creativity, storytelling, and audience attention. Pecha Kucha works especially well for emerging researchers, innovation showcases, or rapid-fire highlights of community projects.
- **Abstract for PhD Report (Emerging Leaders – oral):** Please select the poster option if you do not want to be considered for an oral report (Oral PhD Reports are typically 10

minutes long). These short presentations are designed to showcase the work of emerging scientists/leaders in the field who have received their PhD in the past 2 years.

- **Abstract for Panel Discussion (oral):** Panel discussions bring together multiple experts to explore a key topic from diverse perspectives. Please submit a summary outlining the session theme, objectives, panellists, and proposed discussion points. Panel discussions typically run for 60–90 minutes and require a minimum of three panellists plus a moderator.

The complete details of the guidelines can be found here.

II. What sets a strong abstract apart?

High-scoring abstracts (4–5)	Low-scoring abstracts (1–2)
> Clearly describe what was done, how, and why	> Vague or unclear methods or aims
> Present credible, evidence-based findings	> Claims not supported by evidence
> Draw logical conclusions from the data	> Weak or missing conclusions
> Offer new insights or practical relevance	> Limited relevance to the conference
> Clearly connect to the conference theme	> Overstated or incorrect information