

How to write a conference abstract

An abstract is a short summary of your scientific talk that helps the conference attendees understand what to expect. It should clearly state the research question, explain why it matters, outline how the study was carried out, and if available present the main findings, and highlight the significance of the results. Think of it as advertising for your talk. People will read it to decide whether to attend your talk or one in a parallel session.

Start with one or two sentences of background to set the context and identify the problem your work addresses. Then, state your aim or hypothesis clearly. The next bit is optional, depending on where you are in your thesis. Next, briefly describe the methods you used or intend to use—only include the essentials, no technical details. If you have them, summarise your key results as specifically as possible; avoid vague phrases like “results will be discussed.” Finally, end with a sentence about the broader implications or future directions.

A few general rules

- Keep the language clear and concise.
- Avoid jargon and symbols/special characters where possible.
- Do not add references.
- Since this is about your thesis, write in first person singular (“I did...”), not plural as is common for scientific papers with multiple authors.
- Stick to the word limit (200–250), as exceeding it may disqualify your abstract.
- And finally, make sure your supervisor has read the abstract and do a final proof reading before submission.

Sample abstract

(Biological Sciences, 236 words)

Completely made up example, may not be factually correct

Climate change is rapidly altering ecosystems, yet its effects on plant–pollinator interactions remain poorly understood. Pollinators are essential for biodiversity and food security, making it critical to study how shifts in flowering times influence their activity. My research investigated the impact of earlier flowering in *Leptospermum scoparium* (mānuka), a native New Zealand shrub, on visitation rates by honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) and native solitary bees.

I monitored 30 shrubs across two sites in Canterbury during the 2024 flowering season. Flowering onset was recorded, and standardised observations of pollinator visits were conducted weekly for six weeks. Temperature and rainfall data were also collected.

I found that shrubs flowering earlier than average received significantly fewer visits from honeybees but a higher proportion of visits from solitary bees ($p < 0.05$). This pattern suggests that shifts in flowering phenology may create temporal mismatches between managed honeybee activity and plant resource availability, while potentially favouring native pollinators that are active earlier in the season.

My findings highlight the complexity of plant–pollinator dynamics under climate change. They suggest that native pollinators may play an increasingly important role in sustaining reproduction of early-flowering native plants. Understanding these interactions can inform both conservation efforts and agricultural management strategies in a warming world.

The Annual Biology Conference (ABC) is a single day symposium, organised by the School of Biological Sciences, to provide an opportunity for our postgraduate research students to present their findings to colleagues, peers and to the wider scientific community.

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