

Read the CFP

Consider using ideas from the call to develop your ideas. Be sure to note any length, formatting, or other requirements.

Consider Your Audience

Because reviewers may be selected from all parts of your discipline or subfield, it is important to keep in mind that the persons reviewing your proposal may be familiar with your topic to varying degrees. Thus, it is important to show your expertise while remaining accessible to a general academic audience.

“Be sure the proposal starts strong, with the first sentence laying out the subject and main point of the session (this helps reviewers, who read a lot of proposals).”

Get to the Point

Keeping in mind that reviewers may be tasked with rating anywhere from 8 to 12 to 200 or more proposals, it is important to write a clear proposal that is easy to follow. State your point early in the proposal. Explain what will you present, the evidence and support on which you will draw, and the findings and implications of your research.

“I really appreciate proposals for full sessions with a clear sense of a) how the session will be conducted, if it is in an alternative format in some way and b) what participants will leave with (even if it's as simple as a greater understanding of X).”

Writing an Academic Conference Proposal

J.03 Conference Proposal Submission 101: A Guide to the Process

Situate Your Proposal within a Larger Disciplinary Context

To situate your work for reviewers, consider the disciplinary positioning of the conference. With this context in mind, briefly explain how your presentation contributes to the larger discipline or a specific area within the discipline by citing a key source or scholar(s), and/or situating your work as it pertains to an area of inquiry, ongoing conversation, or major debate in your field of study. How does your presentation build on, extend, challenge, complicate, or disrupt existing work in your field?

“Proposals should be able to situate their argument within their field, in part because it shows that they're knowledgeable about those conversations, but also because a lot of reviewers might not have training/expertise in that specific sub-field. [As a reviewer,] I've had times where I was assigned to a category or a proposal that I just wasn't as familiar with. Authors who could provide a broad strokes portrait of the conversations that this argument was participating in were much easier to evaluate.”

Proofread, Edit, Double-Check

Take the time to proofread your proposal. Consider how well each sentence flows into the next. Use transitions to ensure that the connections between ideas are clear. Be economical with your language.

“Be thorough but be sharply focused and succinct (this helps reviewers reading many proposals).”