

# How to Write a Conference Proposal

## Descriptive Title That Sums Up Your Topic/Argument

**Paragraph 1 – The Introduction:** In the first one or two sentences, **grab your readers' attention** with an interesting point or noteworthy observation to “set the scene.” Then, in the following one to two sentences, briefly **provide some background** and context for your opening statement. Finally, state the “gap,” conflict, or tension—in other words, **what's the problem you intend to solve?**

**Paragraph 2 – The Meat:** In the opening sentence of your second paragraph, provide a brief but compelling **thesis statement**—that is, what's the purpose or main idea of this paper/presentation? In one or two sentences, **describe your methods:** what texts you will examine, any particular scholars you intend to reference and/or theoretical approaches you intend to use, and generally how you intend to make your argument. Finally, end the paragraph by **explaining your results** (hopefully, showing how your methods helped you reach this conclusion). In other words, what's your solution to the problem you stated above? What makes your solution unique, new, timely, or otherwise interesting?

**Paragraph 3 – So What?:** Bluntly **answer the “so what?” question:** Why does this matter? **Explain your key takeaways** and then **connect your takeaways to the conference theme.** Finally, provide a “wrap-up” with a conclusion that **highlights why these takeaways matter** (and, if relevant, to whom).

## Some Tips:

- Highlight what sets your work apart and/or what makes it relevant right now.
- State your purpose in clear terms. (“My purpose is to do X, “This presentation will accomplish X,” etc.)
- Use the active voice wherever possible.
- Write your proposal as though the project is already started. That is, avoid “hedging” phrases like “I intend to do X.” Just say what you're doing, not what you think you'll do...maybe. This makes you seem more confident in the project.
- Write in the “literary present”—e.g., “So-and-so argues that...” unless you are describing a historical event.
- It's OK to use “I” statements. (“In this presentation, I will...”) Avoid “we”—unless there are in fact multiple authors.
- Sprinkle in a few of what Richard Johnson-Sheehan calls “sparkle words” that call back to the conference's theme.
- When describing the “gap” or what sets your work apart, don't trash others.