

SLIDES 1/2:

Awish:

Hi, everyone. We're going to start in about one minute.

Awish:

Hello everyone. Welcome and thank you for joining us for the first professional development webinar of the winter 2020 series. My name is Awish Aslam and I am the Chair and Central Rep. for the CSA student concerns committee. I'd also like to introduce Emma Kay, who is our Eastern Rep.

SLIDE 3:

Emma:

Hi everyone.

Awish:

And Nicole Malette, who is our Western Rep. Although Nicole is unfortunately unable to join us for today's webinar.

We'd like to thank the Canadian Sociological Association for sponsoring this initiative, and Sherry Fox, the Executive Director of the CSA, for the tremendous role she has played in planning and organizing this series. Thank you.

SLIDE 4:

Awish:

Today's webinar is titled, "Writing a Successful Conference Abstract: Practical Tips to Getting Your Abstract Accepted." Our guest speaker, Dr. Kate Butler, is a Child Rights and Protection Advisor at Save the Children Canada. She has 15 years of experience as a researcher, human rights advocate, and educator. In her academic work, she looks at the rights and experiences of children in government care. Kate has taught Sociology of Childhood and Youth at University of Victoria, Brock University, and Ryerson University. Thank you very much for joining us today, Kate.

SLIDE 5:

Awish:

Before we begin, I would like to invite you to submit any questions you might have for Kate during her presentation or the formal Q&A section of the webinar. And you can submit those questions by using the Q&A function, which you can find at the bottom of your screen. Your questions will be visible to all attendees and panelists, and you may also 'like' questions to prioritize them for Kate. Now, I will turn the webinar over to Kate.

SLIDE 6:

Kate:

Thank you so much, Awish, for that warm welcome, and welcome, everybody. I'm looking forward to being part of this webinar series and I'm thrilled to have the first webinar of 2020 to engage with all of you on conference abstracts. I thought that we might just kick things off by getting you to share your experiences. My first question for you, and we're going to use the poll function, is have you ever submitted an abstract to an academic conference? You can click "No," "Yes, once or twice," or "Yes, several times." And secondly, if so, what is your success rate for having your abstract accepted? "Never," "Some were accepted," "Most were accepted," and "All were accepted." I'll give you a minute or two to do that.

Okay, great! Thank you for participating. We'll see those results in a minute. Here we go. It seems that 17 percent of you have never submitted an abstract to an academic conference. That's great—that means we'll be to hopefully do some learnings here today. And then, about 10 of you, so the other 83 percent, have submitted abstracts in the past. And that's wonderful too. We'll be able to hopefully hear from you a little bit and maybe engage on what some of the common challenges you've found are. And again, you can use that chat function or the Q&A function. In terms of success rate, it looks like we have, "All were accepted" and "Most were accepted." So "All were accepted" by four people who've submitted and "Most were accepted" by six people who've submitted, and "Never" by two. So great, that's great to hear that you're getting some success with your abstracts. I look forward to having these next 55 minutes to continue talking about what we can do to ensure you keep up those success rates.

SLIDE 7:

Kate:

Okay, so let's dive in. What are abstracts? Abstracts are short overviews of what you want to present at a conference or event. I really want to emphasize that they're short overviews. Of course, you're not going to be able to include every single thing that you want to talk about in that abstract—in the next hour, because I'll probably be saying that a few times. And what I think is really unique about an abstract is that they really have to be crafted in such a way that you're honing in on the important points that the conference organizers or session organizers want to see. You don't want to just include sort of six sentences about your project. It has to be really clearly linked to what the theme is and to what it is that you're going to present.

Second of all, let's go back to that theme of shortness. I have here that they are usually approximately 300 words. I believe that the CSA abstract is even shorter than that. I have a slide on that coming up, so we can go into a little bit more detail on what CSA is looking for—the Canadian Sociological Association—for Congress this year. But just to note that 300 words is pretty short. I mean, if you're wondering what that looks like, I mean, often that's about—on Word—you know about a paragraph, a pretty short paragraph. You really do have to be concise with what you're going to say.

The third point I want to make is that it must be tailored to the conference and to the session. I was doing a bit of research before this presentation, and as I was preparing my remarks, and I was looking at a lot of sort of online forums where grad students from a variety of disciplines asked questions about, you know, what to put into the abstract and what their chances of success were and all those

things. And I really—one thing that jumped out at me was that there was a lot of questions about this. How do you make sure your abstract is tailored to the conference and to the session? And it is a little bit tricky. We're going to spend a bit of time today talking about that in a bit more detail.

And make sure that you're choosing an appropriate event or conference to pitch your abstract. So, what I mean by this is, you want to make sure that you're not taking your amazing, incredible paper on Durkheim and trying to present it at a conference that's about intersectional feminist theory. I mean, maybe there's a connection there and you're able to make it, but just be really careful in how you choose your event or conference that you are pitching your abstract at. A lot of the phrases you'll see if you look up "How do you write an abstract?"—and I think this is really true in my experience as well—is that you want to make sure—it's almost like an elevator pitch. You're saying in a few short sentences what it is that you've done, what it is you're going to do, and what you're going to talk about. So that's really essential.

I'm not sure if some of you have done those three-minute thesis competitions—I think they're three-minute thesis competitions—they are also somewhat similar to this in that you have to be really careful and really tailor that message to an audience. So that's just another comment about how do we think about narrowing down what we're going to say?

SLIDE 8:

Kate:

Okay, so that's sort of an overview of what we're going to want to include in our abstract—or sorry, an overview of what an abstract is. What is it that we want to include? First of all, you want to say the problem. What do I mean by that? Well you want to say what the issue is. You might say, you know, "Indigenous children are over represented in the foster care system in Ontario. Seven percent of children are Indigenous, and yet they represent over 50 percent of the children in care." Here we're laying out simply, and in that case in two sentences, what our problem is.

The next point that you do is you're going to say sort of what your approach is to studying this problem. I have here your approach/method, which is a little bit messy. I know some of you are probably at the stage in your grad program where you are writing your thesis or you're writing your dissertation, and you might be saying to me or saying to the computer, "Hey, your approach and your methods are separate things. You know, your approach might take in some more of your theoretical considerations and your methods and methodologies are separate." And that's totally right and true, but again, we have about 300 words, sometimes less. So we need to make sure we're really succinct. So just to go back to that previous example, I might say, using an anti-racist feminist approach, I use a qualitative methodology to explore this problem. And then I might discuss the methods that I'm using, whether it's focus groups, in-depth interviews, or whatever it is. You do want to talk about that approach and the methods, but again, keeping it quite succinct.

Next point, if you have data thus far, this is a great place to put it. Conferences and conference organizers, session organizers, they want to see what it is that you can present—what you know. If you are at the stage of your thesis or dissertation where you have data, please do share. It's okay if it's preliminary data, it's okay if this is data that you're still analyzing. Let's say this is a qualitative project—we'll keep going with this example—I might say these focus groups and interviews have

been conducted. Preliminary analysis illustrates that Indigenous children in foster care feel that they face systemic discrimination, personal discrimination, and also systemic gaps around education and health. I can start to point out what my data is showing.

What happens if you don't have data so far? This definitely occurs. I have certainly had this happen to me, and I'm sure some of you have as well because it sounds like a lot of you have presented at conferences or you've had abstracts accepted. This makes me think you're familiar with when this happens, and that's okay. You might have intermediate findings, things that you're going to share so far in your presentation. It's also okay, if you're at the stage in your work where you think you have something interesting to share on, let's say, your theoretical approach, if you're doing something somewhat innovative. Or even something on the methodology piece that's been difficult or challenging or interesting. That can be something that's worthwhile sharing if it's at an appropriate event, appropriate session. I guess my comment here would just be, don't be afraid to write an abstract and to try to pitch a session if you don't have your final data analysis done. It's okay to write these things and to pitch them at that sort of intermediate level.

SLIDE 9:

Kate:

So, what makes a good conference abstract? This is, I suppose, a little bit of the core of what we are doing here. And so, I'll go through these not too quickly, but I just want to make a few points. First of all, be succinct. Don't get too detailed. And if we go back to my example about Indigenous young people in Ontario who are in the foster care system, I'm not going to go into details about, for example, exactly which regions, for instance, have more Indigenous young people in the foster care system. I mean, I might if that was really the focus of my work, but I would probably be able to make a broader statement about the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the in the foster care system. And I want to make sure that what I'm saying can be understood in one or two sentences because there's so much that I need to include in this very brief review.

Second, and I think this is a really important one for everyone, especially grad students. Write really clearly. I really encourage you to avoid jargon. But I have looked at abstracts when I've been part of an organizing panel for a conference, and I have to say it can be a real turnoff in terms of knowing what the person is trying to do if there's a lot of jargon in there. I do acknowledge that there's some fields where this may not be totally relevant. But do try to write so that someone who is not intimately connected to the work you're doing can understand. Let's use the CSA as an example. We know that we're all sociologists, or that most of us who are presenting at the CSA are sociologist. However, we all have slightly different fields of study. We want to make sure we're writing in such a way that it can be understood by sort of sociologists more generally and perhaps by those who are the session organizers. And you know, you are writing to them, but you still want to avoid being overly specific or over overly jargony. Get your point across, but write as clearly as you can.

Stick to the format word limit. This is very important. I think a lot of abstract systems now, when you submit, they won't let you submit over a certain word limit, so please do that.

A captivating title, I think, aim for that, aim to have something that really is interesting, that jumps out when you're organizing a panel. But at the very least have an appropriate title. I'm not just going to

call my sample abstract that I've been talking about, you know, "Indigenous Kids and Foster Care." Instead, I might make something like, "Why so Many Indigenous Children in Foster Care: Exploration of Historical Context, Current Systemic Challenges, and Government Inaction." So, I used all the word that I could in order to have a title that really speaks to what I'm trying to do in a very specific way.

Next is not too many references or bibliography. And so, what I guess I mean by this is to make sure that you don't have—that you're not referencing like, you know, many, many references per sentence. You want to keep it really short. Most abstracts don't let you have a place to write a bibliography. If you need to include a few references, and if it's relevant to your work, I think that's fine for the most part. But remember, again, the panel organizers are probably not going to be going back and looking necessarily at those references. Keep those to a minimum.

Make a connection to the session theme. I think that's an important one for sure. You want to make sure that that you're applying to the correct session. We're going to look at this a bit more in detail in a second. But I would really want you to be clear that the session you are pitching that you should join is relevant to your work. If I'm doing this piece on Indigenous children in foster care, maybe I can find a theme that has to do with Indigenous children or Indigenous young people, maybe there's a connection there. Maybe there's something on marginalized youth or structurally vulnerable youth that would be a good session for me to join. But I would want to make sure that it's pretty relevant to the work that I'm pitching.

Finally, what are you doing that is new or interesting. This one I find can also be a little bit tricky when you're a grad student, because sometimes you are trying to, you know, ensure that you're following the format that your school wants you to follow in writing the thesis or dissertation. But I bet you there is something that you're doing that's interesting that, you know, you're studying this question in a specific way, and that's, that's great. Bring that to what you're doing. Lots of people have looked at the overrepresentation of young people in the foster care system, but maybe my angle is I'm examining the suburbs of Toronto, and so that's the thing that makes my work interesting. I want to talk about why the suburbs of Toronto are really, you know, a microcosm of the structural racism and government inaction that can be seen more widely across the country. This is sort of my area that I'm looking at.

SLIDE 10:

Kate:

The challenges, I have four challenges here. I'm sure we could all come up together, if we had a conversation, with more challenges. I'll just touch on these and perhaps in the questions we can go into some more.

The first comment is different kinds of writing than you are used to doing. And one of the things—well I guess what I mean by this is that you might be used to writing in a very sort of long way, or trying to say a lot of different things, and this is again a very succinct way of writing, for the most part.

And make sure you're, again, finding that session theme or that conference theme that fits with your work.

One of the biggest challenge grad students say is the difficulties of incomplete research. So, kind of, how you deal with the fact that your research isn't totally finished. So that's something that can be an issue for grad students. How you pitch what you're doing is important. With the CSA deadline coming up, I think this is one that is important and there has to be a way that you can maybe talk about some of what you're doing so far, or those methodological challenges, or some of those preliminary findings.

Waiting until the deadline to submit—so the reason I have this here is, as a challenge, I really, really encourage you to talk to your peers, talk to your TAs, talk to your professors, your instructors, and see if they would be willing to read a Conference abstract. I know for me, when I am teaching, when I have students, even if they're past students, I'm usually very willing to read a conference abstract. Because, remember, they're between sort of 100 and 500 words, depending on the conference, so that doesn't take me too much time to read it, give a little bit of feedback, and often that can be really helpful. And I think this could be useful too within a peer-to-peer setting. So do read each other's work, and not to like tear each other apart, but just to try to make sure that abstract is as good as it could be.

SLIDE 11:

Kate:

Okay, so the 2020 CSA conference example. Our theme here, remember, is “Resisting Racism and Colonialism.” They selected this theme as a way to address the broader Congress theme, which is, “Bridging Divides: Confronting Colonialism and Anti-Black Racism.” And this is the CSA conference, so of course we're doing this through a sociological lens. So when we say a sociological lens, we could talk about all the various lenses that sociologists use, but ones that generally would accept as being part of the broader sociological sort of perspective, “Our theme focuses on resistance to the structural inequalities and violence against Black, Indigenous, and racialized peoples, examining social forces in the world around us while remaining self-reflexive about our own disciplinary practices.”

I mean, this is a theme that I think is really broad in a lot of ways, because we can think about a lot of questions around structural inequalities, as well as violence. We're looking at people who face structural vulnerability. And we're also examining social forces in the world around us. And we're thinking about what this means for sociology. I want you to think about this theme as broad, as there's lots of ways that your different work can fit here.

SLIDE 12:

Kate:

So just a reminder for the abstract guidelines, it's 100 to 200 words.

The due date is January 27th, so I think that's less than two weeks away.

You must let the CSA know if you are withdrawing your paper, so if you're not going to submit it, you have to let them know.

And remember to apply for an open session. There's nothing worse than crafting this beautiful abstract and working on it all this time, only to realize that this session is actually closed, and that they have enough people. If you go to the CSA website and you look at which sessions are open, it very clearly says, "Session Open." I believe it's even highlighted. Make sure that you're applying for an open session.

SLIDE 13:

Kate:

Okay, so I just chose a session that we could pretend that we're going to apply for. I'm not sure if there's anyone on the line who goes to these schools, McMaster or Memorial, or who works with these organizers, but I thought it was sort of one that we could examine.

It's part of the Sociology of Canadian Sociology. And it says, "We welcome all recent research that contributes to the sociology of Canadian sociology whether the topic is the socio-political context of sociology in the past, the present, or the future." One of the reasons I wanted to choose this one is it's pretty broad, right? There's a lot of different work that you could be doing that fits really nicely within this session. You might be working, as it says, on individual sociologist, histories of departments, professional associations, and sort of how it might fit in.

I guess what I was going to say is, as you read the second paragraph, it gets a lot more specific. Make sure that you don't just read the first little bit and say, "Oh, they're talking about anything in sociology and Canada." And then you look at the second part, and you say, "Okay, it's a little bit more structured around Canadian sociology departments and what this means for sociology as an academic stream of work."

If you were going to pitch something within this stream, I would want to make sure that I was seeing work that was really tightly tied to something to do with sociology as an academic profession within the university. You might also want to talk on Black, and Indigenous, and marginalized, and other people who are structurally vulnerable within this context, thinking about racism or anti-colonialism. But you may also just want to speak about what this particular session is about.

I guess I just wanted to introduce this as a way that sometimes the session doesn't necessarily speak directly to the conference theme, so you just have to make sure that you can pitch yours at that sort of spot.

SLIDE 14:

Kate:

Okay, so I have a little discussion question here. I'm not sure if this will work, but if you want to, what might you want to talk about when pitching your paper for this session? I'm wondering if I actually can't necessarily see everyone on the Zoom chat, so maybe we'll actually hold off on that for now. And when we do the Q&A, if people want to talk about this one in particular, we can we can return.

SLIDE 15:

Kate:

I have an abstract example that I wrote. It was for CSA last year, and it was accepted. I don't think we need to go into too many details. I just want to be conscious of time because we only have five minutes before we want to have time for questions.

But this is the title of the session, it was "Intersectional Disability Studies in Education: Building Bridges." I begin with this broad statement about all children, "All young people should be able to realize their right to education." And I am sort of referencing international conventions, and then I state my problem, right? "However, like many other social and economic rights, the right to education is denied to far too many Canadians on a regular basis, especially young people with disabilities. This paper examines the framing of the inclusive education movement in Ontario over the last 25 years by looking at." And then I tell you how I'm gathering my data.

So, you know, I'm telling you the historical context, the time period in which I'm looking, and it's an analysis of newspaper articles and opinions, so it's kind of a discourse analysis using secondary sources. And then I argue by drawing attention to the ways inclusive education practices can be tools for realizing human rights, we strengthen the case for a robust and well-resourced education system for all. So that's kind of my preliminary findings, right? This argument that I'm making. And so I haven't necessarily signposted that as my finding, but the fact that I end with, "this is what I'm arguing," the session organizer knows that this is what I'm going to draw attention to.

SLIDE 16:

Kate:

Okay, so important to remember, it is always a good thing to ask someone you trust to read it. I've said this before, but again, please do ask your friends, ask your peers who are in your program, your profs, your instructors. And again, it's great if that person is in your field and knows what you're writing about. I'm sure we all have experiences of being in grad school when, you know, your closest friend in your program could be working on something completely different than you. And it's still valuable to have them read it because they can catch some of the writing errors or challenges, or some of the sort of big picture issues. But it's also great to have someone in your field who reads it and can really say to you, "Hey, I don't know if you need to include details in this way." Or maybe, "Yeah, this is actually a good idea to throw a reference here."

Secondly, be on time. Again, I've said this before, but conferences run on pretty tight schedules. Make sure that you submit when you need to submit. The third one is very important.

Resist the tendency to pitch your whole thesis or dissertation. To the example I just gave, I did make a relatively general argument there. That wasn't a thesis or a dissertation. That was just a paper. But I'm going to focus on certain things in this discussion. I want to make sure they know exactly what I'm doing. In this particular paper, I would be looking at the newspaper articles and op-eds about this issue of inclusive education in Ontario. It's not my whole thesis. It's one particular—or in this case a whole paper—it's one part of this that I'm going to talk about. Just to clarify, it could be an entire

paper if we're talking like a paper with a journal—like a 25-page paper. It certainly could be an abstract for that, but I mean, it's not your whole 400-page PhD dissertation.

Finally, keywords. A lot of conferences ask you to include keywords. If you're having a little bit of trouble with this, like what does that actually mean? Again, please do refer to the session overview. It often gives you a clue as to what those keywords are. Things like social inequality, residential schools might be one that was included, anti-black racism. And so, you want to choose these keywords that are broad enough that they apply to your work and also other people's work. And that they sort of signpost to the organizers that you are a good person to choose for this panel because you are on topic.

SLIDE 17:

Kate:

And, almost the final slide for me, polling attendees. Are you planning on submitting an abstract to the CSA 2020 Conference? It will pop up in a minute. Whether you are or you are not. Perhaps you already have, so “Yes,” “No,” “Unsure.” We'll give you a couple of minutes to do that. You can be honest, it's okay if your answer is no. We know that there's lots of other conferences that might also be really relevant to your work, so just getting a sense of who's trying to do their CSA abstract. Here we go.

And the results are yes, eight of you are, and three people are unsure. So that's great to see. This is good timing because we're only 12 days away. So hopefully this has given you some ideas and again, I'm very open to having some questions in the next 30 minutes.

SLIDE 18:

Kate:

I have some resources here. I believe as Awish said she'll be sharing this around to those of you who are here, so you can click on these if you want to read a little bit more about how to write an abstract. These are actually not tailored for sociology. So just, you know, as budding sociologists, if you will, make sure you're, you know, keeping in mind what you think it is in sociology that we need to do this theoretical grounding, the methodology, that you're doing all those things when you are writing that abstract.

SLIDE 19:

[00:35:40]

Kate:

Okay, that's all. We're at the questions and answers part.

Awish:

Great. Thank you, Kate, for that excellent presentation and for walking us through those examples. So now for the Q&A period, I'll be reading out some of the questions we received through the Q&A function. And then we also received some questions in advance that I'll be posing to you. So, our first question is, "When you say preliminary analysis, in the section on what to include for data thus far, would that include data from a literature review?"

Kate:

Oh, good question. I think yes. Sorry to be a little bit hesitant. But yeah, I think if you've done a really strong literature review, you've looked at—sorry, I'm going to go back to my Indigenous young people in the foster care system example. Let's say, I've looked at all the literature, and one of the things I really noticed it is that there's a gap in academic papers that actually have done some kind of interaction with young people themselves, like sort of qualitative data collection or this participatory approach. That would definitely be something that I think you could write an interesting paper on and a great abstract, right? In that case, your focus isn't so much just the thoughts that there's a high number of Indigenous young people in care, but your abstract becomes being about this gap in the literature. And I think this could be true for sort of more theoretical papers as well. Say you're finding that—you're looking at the social framing literature, and you're finding that there's not much of an emphasis on how Black and African Canadian communities are portrayed in the framing literature. For example, maybe that is a gap in the literature that you've identified. I don't think you're necessarily going to want to write an abstract that's just sort of a summary of a lit review, but I definitely think there could be some preliminary findings there. And, and my last sort of point about that would just be to maybe be careful about how you're framing it. It might be a finding that, I don't know, maybe questionnaires don't work well enough to know, but it also might be that you're framing it as, you know, in the literature review, one of the things that has emerged is. It's kind of it's almost more—I mean, it is a finding, but it's also this gap you've identified.

Awish:

Thank you. Okay. And so, for our next question, so this is one of the questions we received in advance, "How is a conference abstract different from a dissertation abstract?"

Kate:

Yeah. Thank you. I did look at that question in advance. I mean, like, the short answer is, there's a lot of similarities. For me, I know when I wrote my dissertation abstract, it was about three times as long or maybe two times as long as a conference abstract. I just would want to make sure that if you are submitting your dissertation abstract, shorten it, and perhaps focus on one or two different aspects of that dissertation that you're going to use. If this is like a really polished piece of writing you've done, you're proud of it, you want to submit it, that's fine, but maybe shorten it a little bit and zero in on what you're going to be focusing on in your presentation. It's certainly not, you know, something opposite to it or it's not useful, but just be careful about what you're going to use there. Next question?

Awish:

Okay, so we actually have a few questions that are specific to the CSA. I don't necessarily know that you might want to answer these, but I'll pose some of those. Oh, here we go, Sherry is on it. Someone asked, "I'm having a hard time finding the conference sessions. This is my first time going to CSA."

Sherry:

Hi Awish. It's Sherry Fox. I didn't intend to speak today. However, I can weigh in on that. I've gone to the CSA website, under the call for abstracts there, and as you'll see, if you scroll down, we have a list of conference sessions by—in a PDF, which Kate referred to, where the sessions open for abstracts submissions are highlighted. You can also access instructions, so you can determine how to use our online abstracts submission system effectively. You can also view the sessions online. And there we have it broken down if you are interested in a specific research cluster. We have several, we have 35. To help you narrow down your choices you can also search by keyword. To use a search again, you'd have to go back to the homepage. There are many ways to determine which sessions to apply to. Kate can likely better address the question on how to narrow it down. Kate?

Kate:

Yeah, no, thank you for that, Sherry. I'm glad you showed that. And I really would encourage the person to make sure that they they did look through all of them. It's a long PDF document, which is great. But there's a lot of different sessions. One easy way you could do it is you could kind of like, "Control F," or find on whatever computer you have. Try to use the find function and search for word. Just to give an example, last year when I was pitching my paper on disability, I wrote, I think inclusive education. I searched inclusive education. Did any of the sessions have that phrase? And sure enough, they did. There was, I think, maybe just one session had that phrase, but right away, I would know I was going to zero in on that inclusive education session, right? Because that's super relevant to my work. Let's say it hadn't been there. Maybe instead I would have searched disability or something along those lines. Or maybe it's education if I was feeling like I really wasn't getting any hits. So, you know, if it's a really long document and you're struggling, try to help yourself out by looking for some of those keywords that are really relevant to your work. I don't think I have anything else to add to that one unless there's a follow-up questions there.

Awish:

I guess one of the questions that's sort of related is—so someone asked, "On the CSA website, under session proposal submission, it tells us to determine details regarding your session. It asks to include co-organizer names, affiliations, email addresses, if applicable. How would we know if this is applicable to us/what does this mean?"

Sherry:

I can weigh in on that that. That has to do with session proposals. The call for session proposals was scheduled earlier in the fall and sessions are separate from abstracts. Session proposals have already been approved. And those are what is listed over here. You, at this point, would be submitting an abstract to one of these sessions. The comments on co-organizers names and affiliations do not apply to you.

Awish:

Perfect. Thank you.

Sherry:

That's the easiest answer. Thanks, Awish.

Awish:

Okay, our next question is, “I have a couple of ideas for topics/papers in progress to submit, but there’s not an obvious fit for them after reviewing the posted session/panels, as there was last year. Any thoughts on how to approach this?”

Kate:

Oooh! I like this question. It’s a good one. I’ve definitely had the same thing. So please, know that you’re not alone. I think what I would do is I would try to think about my paper and my topic again from a slightly different angle. Let’s say that you’re using an intersectional feminist lens, but for the part of the—you know, you weren’t really going to focus on that as your topic, right? You were instead going to talk about your findings in terms of how children engage in the school yard, you were going to talk about something around that and socialization of young children on the schoolyard. What I would encourage you to do is instead think, “Okay, so my overarching framework under which I operate is an intersectional feminist approach. I bet you there’s a theme that has to do with intersectionality and feminism or something to do with that. Let me look there.” So that would be one way that you might do it, is try to look at that sort of theoretical approach and see if you can find a theme on that. And the other way might be like the methods cluster. Let’s say you’re doing focus groups for this particular study, like how do kids interact on a play yard and how are they socialized? Maybe there’s a session that has to do with the user efficacy of focus groups. So maybe that would be a session that you could apply to. I guess what I would say is, don’t be afraid to apply to a session that is not what you thought you were going to focus on and maybe going in a slightly different direction. I’m also willing to answer emails afterwards. If that person wants to reach out to me, they definitely could do so and maybe we can quickly take a look together something.

Awish:

Great, thank you. Okay, the next question, I’m actually going to combine two questions because they’re on the same topic. A question we received in advance was, “Does every conference abstract require a subsequent paper.” And then we also had someone ask in the chat, “Specifically for the CSA, when you submit an abstract is it presumed you will have a paper by May 1st?”

Kate:

That’s a good question. Sherry has actually given us an answer for it. If that’s okay with Sherry, I’m just going to read it. And she says that this depends on the conference or association, but in the CSA Conference, session organizers determine if they require a paper and or presentation summary in advance of the conference. Approved presenters will be contacted by the organizers about their preference. When submitting abstracts on the CSA site, there is a field where authors indicate if the paper will be completed by May 1st. So I guess what I would say to that, just to talk about my own experience, I think Sherry can probably speak about this as well, but my experience is that if you say your paper is not going to be completed by May 1st, a lot of session organizers are okay with sort of a draft paper, right? Like where you started to frame in whatever way, and again, this doesn’t have to be polished, a draft of what you’re thinking. And the reason behind that is often the organizer and the other people on the panel want to read each other’s papers so that they can comment on them or refer to them or be ready with questions for them. It doesn’t mean that the paper that you write has to necessarily be ready for journal publication, or ready for your dissertation committee, but just that you have something, whether it’s a summary or whatever it is that you can share. Anything. I’m missing, Sherry, there?

Sherry:

No, that's complete. Thank you so much.

Awish:

Thank you. And so next question is, "Would it be appropriate for data thus far to discuss potential findings or early stage findings and then present on actual findings at the conference? If our thesis will be finished by May."

Kate:

Oh, absolutely. Yes, definitely. Definitely. In the abstract, I think it's just a way of how you frame it. I think it's okay to say, "Early findings indicate that blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And, you know, "At the conference, I will elaborate and illustrate my, you know, more polished findings." There's a way you can phrase that, that will allow you to, you know, share that preliminary finding in the abstract, but make a note that you'll present this more fully in June.

Awish:

Great. Okay, our next question, "How do you write a successful biography for your abstract?"

Kate:

Yeah, I was looking at this question, and so I'm going to give you my answer, which is to just be honest. Like it's fine to be a grad student. It's okay that you don't have a ton of papers under your belt or presentations under your belt. And I think it's good to just say that, you know, "My name is Joe. I'm a Master's Student at the University of Alberta in the Sociology Department studying hegemonic masculinities. I have presented at an on-campus event." I guess I would say in your biography, say what your work is, say what your focus of your grad school program is. But don't worry about making yourself sound like you're a tenured professor when you're not and just keep that biography succinct, and it should be fine.

Awish:

Thank you. Okay. You—I guess maybe you've touched on some notes, obviously, throughout your presentation that would be relevant to this question, but, "How do you avoid sounding like a graduate student?" What are the common mistakes?

Kate:

Yeah, yeah! I like that question too. And so first of all, it's not bad to be a graduate student, so let's just start there. I know that you all know that, but again, like the biography question, it's fine that you're grad students, it's good. That's, you know, how we get more people interested in sociology is by training people as grad students. But I think for me it goes back to some of the tips we said earlier, so do avoid being overly jargony, so do avoid, just as if you're just talking to someone else who's equally super, super adept in one particular field, try to be a bit broader. Try to write as clearly as you possibly can. In terms of maybe the findings question might be part of this too, because you're not going to have, you know, a body of literature that you've written in the past. So just being really clear that these are either preliminary findings or a theme that emerged from your literature review might be another way to phrase it. And so I think trying to present whatever your work is in a professional manner is really important. And this is one of the ways that a peer, or a prof, or a supervisor, whoever it is, can be helpful in sort of fine-tuning and crafting that professional sounding abstract.

Awish:

Thank you. Next question, “How do we receive notifications for upcoming conferences relevant to our disciplines? And how do you decide on the best conferences to attend?”

Kate:

Yeah, so this was a question we got an advance, and I liked it too because it definitely made me think of when I was a grad student and I had a very similar question. A few ideas is join a listserv, make sure that you’re on the listserv for your association, but also potentially for associations that you might be tangentially interested in. For example, I’m not exactly sure of the name, but the Canadian Socialist Studies Association. So maybe that’s related to your work. Well get on their listserv as well. Usually you can get on these listservs without formally becoming a member of the association. So that is a good place to start. For instance, for me, if I was writing about disability and education, maybe I’d want to get on the listserv for the education associations, education studies, or disability studies. And I also think asking your supervisor, your professors about upcoming conferences in your discipline, if you work with them quite closely, is a really good way to do it. And, you know, sometimes you just Google stuff, right? Like what, you know, what’s the upcoming conference on foster care? And you’ll find something interesting that comes up. I find Twitter is pretty good for conferences now. I’m on Twitter. I don’t know if a lot of people here are on Twitter. But if you search certain words around, like if you’re following people in your discipline, who are professors, or who are academics, or who present at conferences, they often say, “Hey, come to this conference.” Or they retweet certain conferences. So that would be another way to look, so social media. I think that’s all my ideas for now.

Awish:

Thank you. Okay, two more questions. “How do you decide between a roundtable versus a regular session? What’s the difference?”

Kate:

I’m not sure if at the CSA there’s a specific call for roundtables, and I would think that was already closed, the call for roundtables. But in general, my experience has been that roundtables tend to have more people, it’s more of a discussion, whereas a panel is a bit more formal, a bit more structured. As to which to apply for, I mean, they both go on your CV, they both can look great. As a panelists you might get more like 20 minutes to give your talk, whereas as part of a roundtable it could be a shorter amount of time. I would say it just depends on the topic. I’ve been part of roundtables, I think even at the CSA, where you can have some really interesting conversations and lots of people in the room. But sometimes the panel is where you want to go. I guess I would say if you have the opportunity and you’re feeling a little bit nervous, well then maybe a roundtable is a great way to do it because it’s perhaps a less a formal presentation. And having more people there could bring forward an interesting dialogue, but not to scare you off if you are wanting to do that panel presentation.

Awish:

Thanks. Okay. The last question is, “Is there a common breakdown that you follow when writing an abstract? How much literature, how much findings, how much methods, how much space you spend on each of those?”

Kate:

Yeah, that’s a good question. Um, in my head, I usually think to myself that I have, you know, at most six sentences that I can use, like six or seven sentences, sometimes less. I always open with a

general statement that is about that problem. So, you know, the inability of young people to realize that right to education or even a more general statement about young people having that right to education. Then listing the problem, how I study it, and then finally my findings. So that's, for me, how I do it. And it could be a good way to do it, I would definitely look at some other conference abstracts from your discipline before you sort of commit to something. I would say your methods, unless it's a really big focus, is probably going to be pretty short, like at most a sentence or two. Same with your theoretical approach, you're going to want to make sure that you take up most of that time describing the problem, what you're studying, or how you're studying it, and then your preliminary findings. So that's what you want to focus on and a little bit on sort of what makes your approach unique.

Awish:

Perfect. Thank you. And did you—I just wanted to ask—did you want to go back to that discussion question?

Kate:

No, I think that's good. I think this has been a good discussion.

SLIDE 20:

Awish:

Great. Okay. Thank you so much for an excellent presentation and for walking us through those examples, again, and so yeah, I guess just to wrap it up, a recording of the webinar will be posted online on the Students@CSA page, along with the responses to any questions that we didn't have time to address here. And you can also fill out the feedback survey that we're going to be sending out to you. We'd really appreciate that. So yeah, thank you all for joining us, and we'll see you next time.

Kate:

Thanks, everyone.