

## TOP TEN LIST

# TEN BEST WAYS TO WRITE A BAD HEALTH RESEARCH ABSTRACT

With apologies to David Letterman, and thanks for editorial assistance to Elizabeth Kirby and for their insights to the following Internet contributors:

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R.S. Kirby, November 2002

Top Ten List: Ten Best Ways to Write a Bad Health Research Abstract

### Number 10

#### Everything in good time

In the unlikely event that results are required in the abstract, promise to present them at the conference.

Even better, prepare the abstract before the research project is fully conceptualized. This way, even the study hypotheses can be presented for the first time at the conference.

And best yet, if it's a REALLY good abstract, submit it again to a different conference!

## Number 9

### Symbols vs. Substance

Use unfamiliar acronyms as often as possible, without spelling any of them out. This is especially important when submitting to a multidisciplinary conference or an audience in another field or agency.

Examples might include: MSA, PNC, MXLBW, PNMR, SNAP, FACE.

## Number 8

### Out of sight, out of mind

When submitting abstracts to a website, cut and paste from related documents, but don't bother to proofread the submission before clicking on 'send'. Don't forget to ignore the formatting instructions.

No one else will read the abstract anyway, so why should the corresponding author?

## Number 7

**And the blind shall lead the deaf . . .**

**Present statistical results as succinctly as possible. Leave out qualifiers such as 'percent', 'odds ratio', 'confidence interval', 'standard deviation', or use them incorrectly. Only experienced researchers will be able to figure these out without any assistance, but why should anyone else read the study?**

**Examples include:**

**OR=1.21, CI 0.55-16.82; mean  $3.25 \pm 0.62$ ;  $r = 22\%$**

## Number 6

**There's gold in them thar' hills!**

**Include extraneous details to confuse the reader. Some helpful hints:**

- include tables or graphics that take up the whole abstract
- in the conclusion, restate the results rather than elaborating
- add lengthy description of the underlying theory or model
- draw unsubstantiated conclusions and recommendations
- devote most of the abstract to a listing of data sources and variables to be analyzed
- compare and contrast alternative statistical methods

## Number 5

It's a free country . . .

- Ignore the instructions in the call for abstracts. Especially important are:
  - 1) Submit abstracts that are 'off-topic'
  - 2) Leave out required elements (conclusion, public health implications, sample size, objectives, etc)
  - 3) Don't structure the abstract even if this is required
- Then, submit the abstract even though you know you will be unable to attend the conference
- Don't register for the conference but demand to make your presentation anyway

## Number 4

Image impurity, or

Words can draw a thousand pictures

Use vague adjectives to qualify nouns that are ambiguous, but assume that all readers know what you mean. For example:

- high poverty
- medium density
- fully saturated model
- more parsimonious regression equation
- somewhat small-for-gestational age

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### **Number 3**

**Always judge the book by its cover**

**If the word/keystroke count for the body of the abstract exceeds that for the listing of the title and authors, you have failed.**

**Recruit more co-authors, add more degrees and affiliations, expand the title, or drop content from the abstract to lengthen the heading.**

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### **Number 2**

**It's all in the packaging**

**Use catchy titles, without respect to the conference audience or subject matter.**

**Example:**

**'2x2s, 2x4s, 4x2s, and 4x4s: Some observations on the perinatal epidemiology of construction workers who drive pick-up trucks'**

## Number 1

**Did you say *Central Standard Time*?**

**Submit the abstract late, using excuses similar to those you use when handing in an assignment overdue.**

**For example:**

**“I couldn’t log on to the website”**

**“I didn’t have the analyses complete until 2am”**

**“My grandmother’s dog died, and the memorial service was at the family farm in Minnesota”**