

DON'T JUST DO IT, TALK (AND WRITE) ABOUT IT

When is work not just work? When it has the potential to be an interesting conference presentation or journal article. ALIAWest's Catherine New says too often practising library staff fail to recognise the wider interest and research potential in work projects.

Sometimes we are reinventing the wheel because we are too caught up in our day to day jobs to share our experiences with colleagues who could benefit. To help inspire the Perth library community, ALIAWest recently held an event called Librarians as Researchers at the State Library of WA, attended by over 30 people. Our event coincided with the call for papers for the 2015 Information Online Conference and with promotion of the upcoming ALIA WA Library Symposium, a timely moment to hear from speakers with significant experience in identifying topics worthy of sharing.

Gordon shared his experience co-authoring his first journal article to highlight the key stages of the writing process. He recommended examining the work you are currently doing and what is discussed in the literature. Do you have something to say and contribute to the current body of knowledge?

Gordon also talked about considering where to publish (or present). The aims and scope should be consistent with your intended topic so it's useful to identify a publication source prior to writing. Working in a team may be less daunting as it allows you to draw upon the knowledge and experience of others and creating a plan will help to clarify responsibilities and roles.

Gordon says you should never be afraid of the peer review process or negative feedback from an initial review. Instead, use this to improve the article when it is finally published.

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE CURRENT BODY OF KNOWLEDGE?

Our speakers included Catherine Clark, Associate Director Digital Research at the University of Western Australia and Gordon McIntyre, Librarian Research Services at Edith Cowan University, both of whom provided great advice for practitioners wanting to share experiences and knowledge with colleagues.

Catherine's top tips included collaborating as widely as possible, particularly with non-library people, and recommended working with client groups in particular. She also suggested considering the theme of a conference, or scope of a journal and writing to that. Choosing an engaging title to stand out from the crowd, and using subtitles for description can also help.

David Wells, Manager Collections and Gaby Haddow, Senior Lecturer Information Studies, both of Curtin University then provided us with some practical, how-to advice on writing a conference abstract.

First, David introduced the audience to the process of abstract writing. While in theory it represents an abstraction of a whole, the reality is that conference abstracts are nearly always written before the paper.

When deciding a topic our speakers advised considering whether an idea or project is transferable and would hold interest to an audience beyond your own workplace. Suitable topics would need to demonstrate some level of originality and be achievable, given the timeframes you will be working with. It is also important that the idea be credible (or at least not completely incredible) and any hypothesis supported with evidence.

The topic should also be aligned to the conference audience. This can include the size of the conference, background and level of expertise of the attendees and whether the conference's scope is local, national or international, remembering though that a national conference presentation may benefit from international comparisons and examples, while an international audience might be more interested in local examples. All of these factors will help determine the most relevant aspects of your topic.

Once writing the abstract has commenced, it's important to consider all the potential readers and what will be most appropriate to gain their attention. The first readers will be the conference program panel. For them it is necessary to have a clear title and be extremely clear about what you intend to say. David and Gaby encouraged us to assume our abstracts will be read at 2am, along with 200 other proposals!

If successful, other potential readers include conference attendees, those reading the conference proceedings and people who find the paper in a database. Catchy titles and strong keywords will help the article stand out for these readers. The abstract has to cover everything and sell the idea in very few words and for this reason it is important to have a 'hook' to grab attention. This can be in the title – as long as the abstract explains the concept.

We were told it is important to follow the requirements and criteria of the particular conference to which you want to submit. Know the deadlines and key dates, and ensure you can stick to them. Be careful to submit abstract in appropriate format and within the word count. It is important to write to conference theme in some way, and highlight why your topic is significant and useful to the theme of the conference.

The next major event for ALIAWest will be the ALIA WA Library Symposium, a joint initiative between ALIAWest, WA Library Technicians Group and the WA NewGrads. This will be held at the State Library of Western Australia on Saturday 28 June 2014.

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