Preparing your conference presentation

The research needed in preparing a presentation is no different to that involved in writing the paper, an essay or report. You need to investigate primary and secondary sources and obtain accurate information. In order to present a topic convincingly, you must understand it thoroughly. However, there are significant differences between a written paper, essay or report and a conference presentation. The introduction of a conference presentation should be considerably longer than that of a written text. Repetition is vital in a conference presentation. An audience needs to hear information several times and in slightly different forms to understand it, whereas in a written text the reader can refer back if necessary. Informal rather than formal language should be used in an oral conference presentation.

- Submitting a paper to a conference. Find a ‘catchy’ title as most conferences run parallel sessions and your presentation may compete with numerous (over 20 at major national/international conferences) presentations offered at the same time.

- The abstract. You will need to submit an abstract to the conference committee for your presentation to be accepted. If you have already written your paper, this task should be fairly easy as the abstract is a (usually around 200–400 word) summary of the paper. Ensure the issues, questions, thesis as well as the conclusion findings are clearly stated in the abstract.

- In case the paper has not been written yet, prepare the abstract in such a way that you don’t commit yourself to details that will not be addressed in the final paper.

- Writing the paper. Follow guidelines set by the conference organizers (length, layout, references, etc.), and write the paper as you would an essay, a report, or, more and more commonly, a journal article. The latter is particularly important if the conference proceedings are to be published (refereed or non-refereed). Check previous conference proceedings or journals in your field to ensure consistency with style, referencing, etc.