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Tips on Writing a Winning Conference Proposal

Unfortunately, even for veteran conference presenters, there is sometimes a bit of mystery attached to writing a proposal for an academic conference. After all, what is one supposed to include in one's proposal? In order to demystify this process and assist you in writing a successful proposal for the 2011 SCWCA Conference, we have provided below what we take to be the components of a winning proposal.

Create an Informative yet Interesting Title

Proposal titles serve a dual purpose: they should give a clear idea about the topic of your proposal, and they should also be interesting. While "Plato as a Materialist" is informative, it lacks the element of catchiness; however, "Standing Plato on His Head: A Materialist Interpretation of the Soul in *The Republic*" is both informative and catchy. Remember, if you are accepted, potential attendees will often decide to attend a session by reviewing the titles of presentations, so you should make yours as effective as possible.

Address a Problem in your Discipline

It is absolutely essential to first situate your proposal in terms of the discipline you are working in. What have scholars already researched regarding your topic? What problems have been left unanswered? Although you will not have the space to give an exhaustive review of the scholarly literature, at the very least, you should outline the contours of your topic and the central problem you are seeking to address.

Work with the Language in your Discipline

Although informality might have a place during an actual presentation, you should strive for formality throughout your proposal. Part of this task demands that you use the formal language of the discipline you are working in. For example, if one is engaging in a psychoanalytic reading of a literary text, then one is expected to know and use the appropriate psychoanalytic language (id, ego, super-ego, etc.). By following through on this point, you will gain much in credibility.

Clearly State your Argument

Having briefly and succinctly contextualized your proposal, you are now in an excellent position to state your argument, which should offer an original perspective on the problem you have addressed.

Situate your Argument in Terms of the Conference Theme

Conferences are united by a theme created by the conference organizers. As a general rule, proposals that address the conference theme tend to be accepted more than proposals that neglect

to state how they are relevant to the theme. Ensure that your proposal seeks to explore the theme posed by the organizers.

Clearly State how you will Support your Argument

How you support your argument will largely depend on the discipline you are working in. For example, if you are working as a historian, you will be most likely engaging in an analysis of primary sources; if you are a psychologist, you will most likely be conducting original research. While your proposal should not engage in a detailed and close reading of your sources, expect to at least provide reviewers with a general but clear idea of how you will support your argument.

Address the Scholarly Importance of your Argument

In order for reviewers to take your proposal seriously, it is imperative that you address its importance. This can be done, for example, by referring to how your proposal provides a substantive contribution to the discipline you are working in. Alternatively, you can also make clear how your proposal deals with a matter that is culturally and socially important.

Write with a View towards Clarity

Because you only have a limited amount of space for your proposal, it is essential that your intended meaning is clear. Thus, although you should employ the language of your discipline, you should ensure that such language does not make your message unclear. Additionally, although you should be concise, you should not be concise to the point that your reader is not able to follow your thoughts.

Conform to the Proposal Guidelines

Conference organizers will typically have a large amount of proposals to review; consequently, it is important you respect their time and effort by ensuring that your proposal conforms to all the established guidelines—especially in regard to word length.