

Congress: An Introductory Guide

1) What is Congress?

The annual **Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences** is a week long event where scholars, students, researchers and others in fields of study under the umbrella of Humanities and Social Sciences present and discuss their scholarly work. The Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences hosts approximately 70 academic conferences all taking place within one week - typically at the end of May and beginning of June - at a different Canadian university each year. Each individual conference is focused on a single discipline (e.g. Disability Studies) in the Social Sciences or Humanities. Though most people sign up for a single conference, you're generally welcome to stop by others to learn about different disciplines. Congress also organizes its own "programming" such as public lectures, arts performances, and academic workshops that are open to the public.

2) What is a conference?

A conference is a gathering where people interested in similar topics can meet and talk about their current work and interests. A typical academic conference involves several overlapping "panels" each day where 3-4 people working on similar topics give their own short (10-15 min) presentations to audience members, who can then ask them questions. Presentations might involve reading a short paper, presenting research in progress (perhaps with a PowerPoint), sharing an artwork, or preparing a poster summarizing research. Most conferences also have a "keynote" presentation by a speaker who is well known or accomplished in the field.

3) Who can attend? How can I submit a proposal?

Anyone can attend Congress - undergraduate and graduate students, professors, independent researchers, and community members are all welcome! **You can also attend Congress without being a presenter** (though this might make it harder for students to apply for institutional funding to cover conference-related costs). **If you'd like to present at the CDSA-ACÉH annual conference please refer to this year's**

Call for Papers and (unofficial) guide to writing an abstract (i.e. a short description of what your presentation would be about) below. Other academics in the field who are designated “peer reviewers” will anonymously assess your abstract alongside other submissions to decide who will be invited to present (unfortunately, spots are limited). CDSA-ACÉH strongly encourages students to apply to present and proudly supports a variety of presenters.

4) Why might I be interested in attending?

- **Résumé building:** Attending and/or presenting at a conference looks great on a résumé, especially if you're thinking about applying to graduate school.
- **Networking:** Meet students outside of your program and connect with experienced academics across Canada who may have helpful contacts or readings to suggest to you.
- **Learning:** Get exposed to and be inspired by new ideas! You never know what you might hear about at a conference that sparks your interest.
- **Feedback:** If you want to, you can ask audience members for feedback on your work/work in progress.

5) What kinds of costs are involved?

- **General Congress registration fee** – approximately \$80 before March 31
- **Association membership fee** (i.e. the fee for your specific conference) – approximately \$65 for students for CDSA-ACÉH
- **Travel** to and from the conference (e.g. plane ticket, transit, etc.)
- **Accommodations** (e.g. university residences, hotel) and **food**

Please keep in mind that students can often apply for some conference/travel funding from their own universities. CDSA-ACÉH also offers a couple of student conference awards chosen at random (though these are not guaranteed).

Helpful links:

CDSA-ACÉH website: <http://english.cdsa-aceh.ca/>

Congress 2019 website: <https://www.congress2019.ca/>

Abstracts: An Introductory Guide

1) What is an abstract?

An abstract is a concise description or outline of your proposed presentation. It tells the reader what you plan to explore during your presentation and how, and usually includes some of the broader questions guiding your work. Your abstract gives the reader a sense of how you think and write and is your chance to convince them that you should be a presenter at a conference. **Keywords** are a few words that describe the main themes in your work - you can look at published journal articles to find examples of keywords.

2) How are abstracts assessed for CDSA-ACÉH?

- Clear purpose and feasible goal for a 10-15 minute presentation
- Connects to themes/areas of interest in Critical Disability, Mad, or Deaf Studies
- Shows familiarity with relevant academic literature (e.g. includes keywords, in-text citations, or references major disciplinary work/authors/ideas)
- States potential contribution of this work (i.e. your proposed presentation) to activism/advocacy/research/theory
- Creativity/novelty (What is exciting about this work?)

3) Tips and Tricks

- Use a catchy but still informative title
- Do not exceed the word limit stated in the Call for Papers, but use the space you have
- Propose a presentation that you can actually give in 10-15 minutes. An abstract is not like a class paper. The goal isn't to show comprehensiveness, but to introduce the audience to new questions and leave them with something to think on.
- Write formally and edit carefully for typos. Be as clear as possible.

- Assume your audience is already familiar with the field - for example, any reviewer for CDSA-ACÉH will already know about the Social Model of Disability
- Use in-text citations to show familiarity with the literature
- Do not include long quotations - you only have 250 words to show how *you* think and write
- Consider justifying potentially controversial language choices used in your abstract
- Consider sharing your abstract with someone experienced in your discipline to look over before submitting
- If possible, try to connect your abstract to the current conference theme(s)
- Also...know that you do not have to present new research (e.g. research you haven't done for a class) or completed research. For example, some people use conference presentations to reflect on past research experiences or do relevant auto-ethnography. Others show films they have created or put together a related workshop (e.g. a "death café")

4) Helpful links:

- <https://www.exordo.com/blog/how-to-write-an-abstract-for-a-conference/>
- <https://bakercatherine.wordpress.com/2017/03/15/how-to-write-a-conference-abstract-a-five-part-plan-for-pitching-your-research-at-almost-anything/>
- <https://theprofessorisin.com/2011/07/12/how-today-how-to-write-a-paper-abstract/>

Fictional Abstract Example

Please note that the following is intended to be a humorous abstract example for a paper presentation. Your abstract DOES NOT need to be convoluted or contain this much academic jargon.

<i>Catchy but clear title</i>	When human problems become animal problems: Anthropomorphic Approaches to Disability
<i>Situates work in current events</i>	The increased rate of impairment among escaped house cats has emerged as a pressing social issue.
<i>States main question/problem being investigated and methodology</i>	Employing a critical discourse analysis of mainstream news reports on impairments and animal shelters from September-November 2018 in Toronto, ON, this presentation will explore representations of disability in the contexts of speciesism and the neoliberal downgrading of care from a national to a community responsibility.
<i>References gap in current literature</i>	Literature integrating Critical Animal Studies into Critical Disability Studies work has been historically limited, though the potential of such work has been gestured to in the past by writers such as Crippled Fox (2006; 2016) and Mad Bunny (2015).
<i>Evidence of familiarity with relevant literature</i>	Following the recent provocative work of scholars Critical Disabee and Social ModElle (2018), I will argue that the human rejection of cats with acquired impairments is linked to an anthropomorphic aversion to disability supported by current neoliberal discourses, and that cats who sense this aversion are more likely to attempt to escape their homes in the first place.

<i>Shows importance of this work for the field</i>	Governments continue to pass legislation and policies informed by neoliberal ideology. As humans continue to adopt cats at the same, if not higher, rates as other animals, it is imperative that we better understand what aspects of impairment they believe make their cats undesirable, and how the broader economic context of neoliberalism exacerbates these beliefs and this situation.
<i>Connection to current conference theme - e.g. "Circles of Conversation"</i>	Given the ongoing co-habitation of humans and non-human creatures of varying embodiments (Big Name, 2007), it is important that we bring these different groups into conversation with one another so that we can work towards compromises that limit the invasion of violent and destructive human ideas into animals' - and our pets' - lives.

Places to look for more serious abstract examples:

- **Women's and Gender Studies et Recherches Féministes previous conference programs:**
<https://www.wgsrf.com/previous-conference-programs.html>
- **Canadian Sociological Association past conference program:**
<https://www.csa-scs.ca/conference/wp-content/uploads/2017-CSA-SCS-Conference-Archive-Program.pdf>
- **Canadian Association for Social Work previous conference programs:**
<https://caswe-acfts.ca/conference/>