

## **How to put together a symposium for the ABCT convention**

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Giving a talk at the annual Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) convention is a wonderful way to share your work, generate dialogue about it, find potential collaborators, and to build your professional reputation and network. At ABCT there are several formats for presenting: Clinical round tables, panel discussions, symposia, and workshops. This document provides suggestions for how to put together (i.e., chair) a symposium. It is hoped that this document will spur members of the Addictive Behaviors Special Interest Group (AB SIG) to develop symposia for upcoming conventions. This document represents a limited sample of two AB SIG members' perspective on how to arrange and chair a symposium.

A symposium is a set of three to five individual presentations that are arranged around a common theme/topic. Symposia are scheduled for 60 or 90 minute blocks depending upon the number of presentations. Therefore, each presentation is typically 15 to 20 minutes in length. Additionally, brief introductory remarks about the topic are provided by the chair of the symposium at the beginning and a discussant concludes the symposium with some closing remarks.

While other conferences may arrange symposia by grouping together separately submitted talks, at ABCT it is up to an individual to create and submit (i.e., chair) a symposium of several presentations. Therefore, below is a description of how to go about constructing and submitting a symposium for ABCT.

**Timeline for submitting a symposium:** Symposium submissions for ABCT are due at the beginning of March each year (same deadline as the poster submission). Therefore, in order to arrange a symposium and give the other presenters enough time to put together their materials it is suggested that individuals who want to chair a symposium begin planning by the end of January.

### **Tasks:**

**Decide if you have data or an idea that you would like to present.** Generally, if you have data from a study you have completed (e.g., first-year project, masters thesis), and the results are interesting, then that will make for a good presentation. Very small samples, null findings, and very post-hoc/secondary analyses generally are better suited to posters. However, if you have been testing a novel treatment, conducting research with a unique population, or conducting preliminary testing of a complex construct, your findings could be appropriate for an oral presentation.

**Come up with a theme or topic for your symposium.** Typically a chair of the symposium will give one of the presentations. Therefore, consider the many different possible themes that your presentation might fit within. For example, possible themes/topics include a specific disorder or population, a certain treatment approach, or an individual difference variable (e.g., impulsivity). As you consider your options it may be helpful to refer to past ABCT program books and see what has been done previously. Being flexible about your theme is required as your task is to find two to four additional presenters and a discussant

to fill out a symposium. Not everyone you contact will be available, and the theme may need revamping depending upon the potpourri of presentations that is assembled.

**Find and invite other presenters to round out your symposium.** For early career individuals (including graduate students) this task can be anxiety provoking. However, for the person receiving the invitation it is a compliment to be invited to join a symposium. The person organizing the symposium respects your work and wants to hear more about it!

*How do I find others who might have work that fits with my potential theme?* There are several avenues to explore. First, ask others in your lab if they want to present – hopefully you are doing similar work. Also ask your mentor for suggestions for other presenters. He or she also may be helpful with introductions. Next, review prior ABCT convention program books or think about past ABCT conventions you've attended. Who presented (including posters) on topics related to yours? Those individuals may have new work to share. This approach is especially advantageous as the person is already a member of ABCT and has attended the convention (the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior!). A second approach is to conduct a literature search and find others doing similar work. This approach is a little more challenging as the identified individual may not be an ABCT member or ever been to the convention. However, one caveat to this approach is if the identified individual resides in or is nearby the ABCT convention host city. For example, if the convention is in Chicago consider researchers and clinicians at Northwestern, University of Chicago, University of Illinois at Chicago, DePaul University, Roosevelt, Rush Medical Center, Loyola University, etc. Even if someone says, "no" to your request ask that person if he or she has a suggestion of someone else to contact (e.g., current or former graduate students). Persist until you have your 3-5 presentations lined up. It may take 5 to 6 invitations to get the 2 to 4 additional presentations.

It is suggested that the composition of the individuals forming the symposium not be from the same institution. This is not a hard and fast rule, but rather a suggestion. The symposium will avoid certain (mis)perceptions about the general interest in the topic.

Finally, the discussant for a symposium is usually a more senior member of the field who has experience and can provide an overview and context for the results that are presented.

**Collect abstracts and contact information of participants (including presentation co-authors).** The ABCT website has specific instructions on the contact information needed. Allow yourself at least a week before the submission deadline to coordinate collection of this information and abstracts. Do not underestimate how long it will take to enter this information into the ABCT submission system!

**Write the overarching symposium abstract.** The other reason to give yourself a week to collate and submit the abstracts is that an additional abstract has to be written: the abstract for the entire symposium. This abstract is to provide an overview of the topic and how each talk contributes to the theme of the symposium. A typical structure for this abstract is a paragraph about the importance of the symposium and a paragraph on the individual presentations, how they meld with the symposium topic, and what the discussant will touch upon. It is also helpful to incorporate into the abstract how the symposium aligns with the ABCT convention theme for that year.

**Submit and wait!** After submitting the symposium to ABCT, the chair will hear back sometime in May about its acceptance or not. If so, congratulations! Be sure to share this information with the primary authors of the presentations within the symposium so they can make plans for attending ABCT. In early October, the chair should discuss with the other presenters the order of presentations, time allotted for each talk, and when slides are due to the discussant so he or she has time to prepare remarks.

Lastly, at the next ABCT convention talk to others attending the convention about doing a symposium for next year!