ABSTRACTS MENTORSHIP TOOLKIT

Contents

1. Introduction

This toolkit is designed to assist mentors in guiding researchers and professionals preparing abstracts for the Society of AIDS in Africa (SAA) to strengthen Abstract submission at ICASA Conference and other conferences as well. It provides comprehensive guidelines, strategies, and resources to ensure high-quality abstract submissions.

As a mentor, your role is crucial in helping authors present their research effectively and contribute to the ongoing fight against HIV/AIDS, STIs, TB, Malaria, Hepatitis, Health System Strengthening, emerging and re-emerging infections in Africa. This toolkit is drafted to equip you with the necessary information and strategies to help you guide your mentees through the abstract submission process and publication into SAA Journal.

2. Understanding the ICASA Conference

The International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA) is the largest AIDS conference in Africa. Organized by the Society for AIDS in Africa (SAA), it takes place every two years in different African countries.

Key points:

✓ ICASA brings together 7,000 to 10,000 delegates from nearly 150 countries

✓ It provides a forum for exchange of knowledge, skills, and best practices in HIV/AIDS, STIs, TB, Malaria, Hepatitis, Health System Strengthening, emerging and re-emerging infections in Africa.

✓ The conference themes typically cover epidemiology, research, treatment, prevention, policy and contemporary issues.

The abstract submission process is critical as it determines which research will be presented at the conference in the quest to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS and to strengthen the health system in Africa.

3. Abstract Submission Guidelines

Adhering to submission guidelines is crucial for abstract acceptance. Key points include:

❖ Submission deadline: 3 months (1st March – 31st May) from the date of announcement

❖ Word limit: Maximum 350 words (excluding title and authors)

❖ Required sections: Background, Description, Lessons Learnt, and Conclusions or Background, Methods, Results and Conclusions.

❖ Formatting: Often submitted through an online portal in plain text format

❖ Categories: Abstracts are usually submitted under specific tracks (e.g., Basic Science, Clinical Science, Epidemiology, Social Science)

Encourage your mentees to start early and review the official ICASA website for the most up-to-date guidelines.

4. Components of an Abstract

4.1. A scientific abstract should include:

1. Title (Not more than 20 words):

- Clear, concise, and reflective of the study's content
- Avoid abbreviations and jargon
- You should include details on Study location, Study design and Study population

2. Background (2-3 sentences):

- Problem statement
- A clear statement of the study objectives or research question

3. Methods (6 sentences):

- Study design
- Study setting
- Date of data collection
- Study participants (inclusion and exclusions criteria)
- Study variables
- Analytical methods

4. Results (4-5 sentences):

- Sample size
- Report the descriptive findings for study variables
- Report the outcomes for the study objective/research question(s)

5. Conclusions (2 sentences):

- Answer to study objective
- Implications for practice, policy, or further research

NB: Emphasize to your mentees the importance of clarity, conciseness, and logical flow between sections. During the presentation the speaker can provide some examples.

4.2. A community abstract Option 1:
Issues

- State the specific problem or challenge in your communityA clear statement of the objective of the abstract

Description

- Describe how the community was involved
- Present what was actually done or implemented
- Share the main activities and interventions
- Include the scale of implementation (numbers reached)
- Describe any adaptations made during implementation
- Note community response and participation levels

Lessons Learned

- Share key findings and outcomes
- Highlight what worked well and what didn't
- Describe unexpected challenges and how they were addressed
- Include community feedback and responses
- Highlight innovative aspects of your approach
- Note implications for future programming
- Suggest recommendations for similar initiatives

Next steps:

- Share key findings and outcomes
- Highlight what worked well and what didn't

Abstract Submission Keywords

5. Common pitfalls and how to avoid them

Guide your mentees to avoid these common issues:

1. Exceeding word limit:

- Encourage concise writing and ruthless editing.
- Suggest focusing on key points only.
- Suggest using informative and short sentences.
- Avoid tautologies.

2. Lack of clarity or focus:

- Advise on having a clear research question or objectives (one or two).
- Encourage use of simple, direct language.

3. Inadequate description of methods:

- Stress the importance of providing the useful information and avoiding unnecessary details.

Suggest focusing on key methodological aspects.

4. Overstatement of results:

- Encourage balanced interpretation of findings.
- Advise against claims not supported by the data presented.

5. Disconnection between objectives and conclusions:

- Ensure conclusions directly address the stated objectives.
- Ensure conclusions aligned to results and underline the message where possible.

6. Grammar and spelling errors:

- Recommend thorough proofreading.
- Suggest seeking help from a native English speaker if needed.

6. Mentoring Strategies

Effective mentoring can significantly improve abstract quality.

1. Establish a mentoring schedule:

- ✓ Set regular check-ins (e.g., weekly or bi-weekly).
- ✓ Define clear milestones and deadlines.

2. Effective communication:

- ✓ Use clear, constructive language.
- ✓ Highlight the key messages.
- ✓ Provide examples whenever possible
- ✓ Use interactive methods.
- ✓ Encourage questions and open dialogue.

3. Providing feedback:

- ✓ Be specific and actionable in your comments.
- ✓ Thank mentees for asking before criticism.
- ✓ Balance critique with positive reinforcement.

4. Encourage critical thinking:

- ✓ Ask probing questions about the research.
- ✓ Help mentees see their work from different perspectives.

5. Address language barriers:

- ✓ Provide resources for scientific writing in English.
- ✓ Suggest language editing services if necessary.

7. Review and Feedback Process

A structured review process can help improve abstract quality.

1. Initial review:

- Check for adherence to submission guidelines.
- Assess overall structure and flow.
- AI generated Abstract will be drop (Don't use AI to write your Abstract).

2. Content review:

- Evaluate scientific merit and originality.
- Check for logical progression of ideas.
- Check that the findings reported are consistent

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3. Detailed feedback:

- Provide specific suggestions for improvement.
- Use 'track changes' or comment features in documents.

4. Encourage revision:

- Set clear expectations for revisions
- Allow time for multiple rounds of feedback

5. Final review:

- Conduct a final check against the submission criteria
- Proofread for any remaining errors

8. Resources and References

Provide your mentees with these helpful resources:

1. SAA official website: https://www.saafrica.org/

2. Sample abstracts: Access previous ICASA abstract books for examples

3. Writing guides:

- ❖ "How to Write a Good Abstract" by Andrade C. (2011), Indian J Psychiatry
- ❖ "Ten Simple Rules for Writing Abstracts" by Letchford et al. (2015), PLOS Computational Biology
- ❖ How to write best Abstract – https://www.saafrica.org/pages/webinar/ (Prof. Seni Kouanda and Prof. Morenike Ukpong)

4. Online tutorials:

- ❖ Coursera: "Writing in the Sciences"
- ❖ edX: "How to Write an Essay"

5. Language support:

- ❖ Grammarly (for grammar and style checking)
- ❖ Google Scholar (for checking appropriate scientific terminology)
- ❖ Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy- Abstract writing is work done but AI can be used to enhance work done
- ❖ Plagiarism
- ❖ Accepted UNAIDS and WHO terminology

Certification

Certificates will be awarded upon completion of the Mentorship Programme to Mentors and Mentees who successfully completed the training.

NB: Remember to check and update these resources regularly to ensure they remain current and relevant.

Practical Session

- Time: One and Half Hour
- Training Language: English and French

ABSTRACT SCORING CRITERIA

SCORING CRITERIA

Option 1

- Does the background include a problem statement and objective/research question?

- Does the methodology include details on the study design, study setting, study population, date of data collection, study variables and the analytical tools?

- Are the results clearly presents data to address the study objective/research question?

- Does the conclusions include the answer to the research question and a recommendation?

- Is the study original, and does it contribute to the field?

Option 2

- Does the background include a problem statement and objective/research question?

- Is the programme, project or policy design and implementation appropriate for the objectives?

- Are the lessons learned or best practices important, supported by the findings and clearly presented?

- Are the conclusions/next steps supported by the results and are they feasible?

- Is the work reported original, and does it contribute to the field?

SCORING SCALE (APPLICABLE FOR BOTH OPTION 1 AND OPTION 2)

Score	Score Descriptors
1	Very weak: shows one or more critical shortcomings
2	Weak: shows significant weakness
3	Adequate: meets criteria
4	Good: meets criteria and has some distinctive value
5	Strong: meets all and exceeds some criteria, and has distinctive value in several ways
6	Excellent: exceeds expectations on all criteria

FINAL SCORE RECOMMENDATION (APPLICABLE FOR BOTH OPTION 1 AND OPTION 2)

Score	Final Score Recommendation
1.0 – 1.4	Definite rejection
1.5 – 2.4	Recommended as rejected
2.5 – 3.4	Recommended as a potential poster exhibition
3.5 – 4.4	Recommended as a poster exhibition or potentially as a poster discussion
4.5 – 5.4	Recommended as poster discussion or potentially as an oral
5.5 – 6.0	Definite oral

GUIDELINES FOR ICASA ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Please read the following guidelines carefully before submitting your abstract:

- All abstracts may be written in English or French. Texts written in other alphabets other than the above two mentioned languages cannot be saved by the submission system.
- If you wish to submit an abstract besides the two languages specified above, we recommend you have your abstract translated and reviewed before submission.
- Abstracts can only be submitted online via the conference website abstract submission portal; those submitted by fax, post or e-mail will not be considered.
- All abstracts submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

All submissions will be acknowledged upon successful submission via the website.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The number of authors per abstract is –not limited. However, only one author can be listed as the presenting author.

Use a standard style, Arial font and size 11 when formatting your text. This will help to prevent special characters from getting lost when copying your text to the online abstract submission form. Always make sure to check the final abstract with the system's preview function before submission, and edit or replace it as necessary.

Tables, figures, literature references, and acknowledgements should not be part of the abstract's content.

It is the principal author's responsibility to submit a correct abstract. Any errors in spelling, grammar or scientific fact will be reproduced as typed by the principal author.

Abstracts must not have been published for presentation to any other national or international conference or meeting or already published in any journal. An abstract that was submitted but was not accepted in previous conferences is valid and may be submitted for ICASA.

Define all abbreviations and concepts in your abstract at first use.

For therapeutic agents, only International Non-proprietary Name (INN) should be used (trade names are not permitted).

If you have any questions regarding your abstract submission, please contact the abstract support team at abstract@saafrica.org

We encourage work that introduces new ideas and conceptualizations, research and understandings to the field, as well as analysis of both success and failure.

Abstracts should disclose primary findings and avoid, whenever possible, promissory statements such as "experiments are in progress" or "results will be discussed".

Your abstract, if accepted, will be published in its full form in the abstract/programme book, and made available on the conference (ICASA) website. A flash drive will be distributed to all registered delegates at the conference.

The Conference offers two options for abstract submission: OPTION 1 and OPTION 2.

Option 1

The first option is most suited for scientific research. Abstracts presented under the first option should contain concise statements of:

Background: indicates the purpose and objective of the research, the tested hypothesis or a description of the problem being analysed or evaluated.

Methods: describe the setting/location for the study, study design, study population, data collection and methods of analysis used.

Results: present as clearly as possible the findings/outcome of the study, with specific results in summarized form. The inclusion of gender breakdown of data is strongly encouraged.

Conclusions and Recommendations: briefly discuss the data and main outcome of the study. Emphasize the significance of HIV prevention, treatment, care and/or support, and future implications of the results.

Option 2

The second option is most suited for presenting new knowledge or analysis important for understanding and responding to the HIV epidemic and its future implications. It is suited for information gained through systematic knowledge production/ management, other than scientific research or evaluation including community-level experiences and best practices in response to HIV and AIDS. This process must include some evidence provided through the data obtained.

Abstracts presented under the second option should contain concise statements of:

Issues: a summary of the issue(s) addressed by the abstract.

Description: a description of the intervention, project, experience, service and/or advocacy.

Lessons learned: conclusions and implications of the intervention or project. Data that support the lessons learned and evidence must be included.

Next steps: possible next steps for implementation, or recommendations.

GENDER ANALYSIS IN ABSTRACTS

The inclusion of gender breakdown of data is strongly encouraged and should be provided as well as a comprehensive gender analysis in the results section whenever possible. If applicable, your abstract should include the number and percentage of men and women participating in your research or project, and gender disaggregated data. If your research or project was specific to one gender, please state.

CHOOSING ABSTRACT TRACK CATEGORIES

The abstract track category is the general heading under which your abstract will be reviewed and later published in the conference printed matters if accepted. Please choose the category which

best describes the subject of your abstract. Refer to the Track Categories section of the website to get more information.

CROSS-CUTTING THEME

ICASA has identified a number of cross-cutting themes, with relevance across the five tracks. These cross-cutting themes will help structure the whole programme of the conference and will serve as a basis for interdisciplinary sessions conveying presentations from various tracks and disciplines on relevant issues. In addition to choosing the Track Categories, you may also indicate that it is relevant to your abstract.

KEYWORDS

In addition to the abstract category, please indicate 3-5 keywords (free text, maximum 25 characters per keyword) in bold at the bottom of your abstract. The keywords must be representative of the content of the abstract. If relevant, please specify the subject/population, setting/location and objective/outcome.

ICASA CONFERENCE PROFILE

Before submitting an abstract, you need to create a Conference profile from which you can enter the abstract system. You can submit one or several abstracts from your Conference profile. After an abstract has been created, modifications can be made before the abstract submission deadline (**31st May 2025**). No modifications can be made after the abstract submission deadline.

ABSTRACT BLIND PEER REVIEW

All submitted abstracts will go through a blind peer-review process carried out by a reviewing committee. Three independent reviewers will review each abstract. Notification of Acceptance or Rejection to Corresponding Author Notification of acceptance or rejection will be sent to the submitting (corresponding) author from **25th – 29th August 2025**. Please note that only the corresponding author will receive an email pertaining to the status of the submitted abstract and is responsible for informing all co-authors.

WORD COUNT

Abstract Title is a maximum of 100 characters (20 words). Abstract text is a maximum of 300 words. The standard font is Arial, standard style and size 11, when formatting your text.

CONSENT (COMPULSORY)

At the end of your submission, you're required to consent upon review and selection, that your abstract would be published in the SAA/ICASA journal and all our relevant platforms. Please note that this is compulsory before your submission is considered validated and successfully submitted.

ICASA ABSTRACT MENTORSHIP WORKSHOP PROGRAM

Time	Topic	Session Content	Facilitator
13:00 - 13:20	Opening Session	• Welcome and introduction to ICASA Conference • Overview of workshop objectives • Brief introduction of participants	Prof. Mohamed Chakroun
13:20 - 13:50	Understanding Abstract Components & Common Pitfalls & Solutions	• Essential components of a strong abstract • Title writing • Background formulation • Methods description • Results presentation • Conclusions crafting • Review of frequent submission errors • Strategies for avoiding common mistakes • Interactive examples and discussion	Dr. Munya Saruchera / Prof. Morenike Upkong
13:50 - 14:35	Practical Session Mentoring Best Practices	• Hands-on abstract review exercise • Effective feedback techniques • Communication strategies • Setting milestones and deadlines • Application of review criteria • Group work (Discussion of real examples) • Tools and Resources	Prof. Mohamed Chakroun All Facilitators
14:35 - 14:45	Break		
14:45 - 15:00	ICASA 2025 Mentorship Platform	Presentation of ICASA 2025 EventsAir Platform	Felix Apana Okley
15:00 – 15:05	Closing Session	• Summary of key points • Information about resources and support • Next steps and contact information	Prof. Mohamed Chakroun

Required Materials:

- Sample abstracts for review
- Abstract evaluation checklist
- Resource list
- Feedback forms

Notes:

- All sessions include interactive elements
- Participants will receive digital and printed handouts
- Session recording will be shared with the Mentors
- Online resources access will be shared during closing
- Certificate will be issued after the Mentorship Programme, to Mentors in good standing and Mentees who have successfully went through the training.

ICASA 2025 CONFERENCE KEY DATES

KEY DATES	OPEN	CLOSE
Call for ICASA 2025 logo	12th September 2024	18th November 2024
Call for ICASA 2025 Thematics	12th September 2024	25th October 2024
1st ISC meeting	28th November 2024	29th November 2024
Call for Abstract	1st March 2025	30th May 2025, 24.00 GMT
Early Registration	1st March 2025	30th May 2025, 24.00 GMT
2nd ISC meeting	29th March 2025	1st April 2025
Call for Abstract Reviewers	3rd February 2025	30th May 2025
Regular Registration	1st June 2025	31st August 2025, 24.00 GMT
Exhibition Booking		
Exhibition - Early Bird Booking	1st March 2025	31st August 2025
Exhibition - Late Booking	Applies after 31st August 2025	
Satellite Session Booking	1st March 2025	31st August 2025
Late Registration	1st September 2025	31st October 2025, 24.00 GMT
Scholarship Application	3rd July 2025	31st July 2025
Reviewing of Abstracts	7th July 2025	7th August 2025
Marathon Meeting	18th August 2025	21st August 2025
Notice of Acceptance, Abstract	25th August 2025	29th August 2025
Announcement of Recipient Scholarship	29th August 2025	1st September 2025
ICASA 2025 Online Programme	15th September 2025	
ICASA 2025 Conference Date	3rd December 2025	8th December 2025

SAA PERMANENT SECRETARIAT

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