



TESOL Connections

Keeping English language professionals connected

6 Steps to Submitting a Successful TESOL Convention Proposal

by [Hilal Peker](#)

As we plan for another great year with the TESOL community after such an enriching convention in Portland, Oregon, USA, I have been reflecting on previous years—I do this after each conference to set new professional goals for myself and for my students. My very first involvement with the TESOL International Association community was in 2013, during the TESOL convention in Dallas, Texas, USA. At the time, I was an MA student at the University of Texas at Austin, and I had a chance to attend the conference in person. After my first exposure to such a diverse community, I began a path of volunteering, which led to one of leadership: from proposal reviewer to various professional councils, and then from assistant strand coordinator to the Conferences Professional Council (CPC), where I helped choose proposals that are diverse in terms of content, context, settings, focus, and type. This year, I was nominated as the chair of CPC (2023–2024).

I have been getting a lot of questions from my colleagues and students regarding how to write a successful proposal for the TESOL International convention. I am aware that getting accepted to present at TESOL conventions is crucial for many scholars around the world, especially for international members who may need funding from their institutions to attend. Thus, I hope you will find these tips on how to write and submit a successful proposal useful.

Proposal Worksheet

TESOL International Association provides two separate proposal worksheets (i.e., [in-person](#) and [virtual](#)) so that you can prepare your proposal in advance of submission. The advantages of this are twofold:

- The worksheet is aligned to the steps in the submission system.
- If you write your proposal online as you fill out the online submission form, the system will often time out.

In 2019, when I was supervising graduate students at a research university in Turkey, I decided to use this worksheet to teach them how to write successful TESOL proposals. I knew the TESOL convention was a great opportunity for them to be involved in such a diverse community and—if their proposals were accepted—to kickstart their professional networking after graduation. In addition, the institutions where they were working as English as a foreign language (EFL)

instructors would support their attendance to the convention if they were presenting. Knowing how important the financial support for my students was, I did my best to prepare them through several workshops; the steps I shared with them follow.

Steps for Creating Successful Proposals

Step 1: Review Previous Proposals

Look at previously accepted TESOL abstracts to see some examples. You can view the [2022 Program Book](#) online; also ask colleagues who are past presenters for samples. I showed my students some of my accepted proposals—and the rejected ones—so that they could compare them; I believe learning what *not* to do is as important as learning what to do. In examining accepted proposals, pay attention to the details and note what methods, design, tasks, and activities were included in each sample proposal.

- **Power Tip:** Read the [call for proposals](#) closely; the call for proposals page includes various resources and documents to help make your proposal submission smooth.

Step 2: Select Your Focus

Examine the [session focus types](#) on TESOL's website to decide what type of study you would like to present. For instance, if you conducted an original research study in which you collected empirical data based on specific criteria and want to provide theoretical and pedagogical implications, you may want to submit your proposal as a research-oriented session. However, if you conducted classroom research and want your attendees to learn about teaching, grading, creating classroom tasks, and so on, you can submit your proposal as a practice- or pedagogy-oriented proposal, which will give the attendees opportunities for more hands-on experiences.

Step 3: Select Your Strand

Consider which strand, or topic/content area, you would like to submit for. Currently, there are 13 strands:

1. Advocacy, Social Justice, & Community Building
2. Applied Linguistics
3. Content-Integrated Approaches
4. Culture & Intercultural Communication
5. Digital Learning & Technologies
6. Language Assessment
7. Listening, Speaking & Pronunciation
8. Materials Development & Publishing
9. Personal & Professional Development
10. Program Administration & Evaluation
11. Reading, Writing, & Literacy
12. Teacher Education
13. Vocabulary & Grammar

You can read more about each strand, including sample proposal areas, [here](#). Choosing a strand is very important because each strand trains their reviewers based on the strand's focus; your proposal will be reviewed by three reviewers with specific topical training, so make sure the focus of your proposal is relevant to the strand.

Step 4: Select a Session Type

Consider the format you'd like to use to present your content, and think about how long it will take. Following are the session types you can choose from. (This is the only difference between the in-person and virtual worksheets.):

In-Person Convention Session Types

- dialogue (45 min)
- panel discussion (1 hr, 15 min)
- panel discussion (45 min)
- poster session (1 hr, 45 min)
- presentation (30 min)
- presentation (45 min)
- teaching tip (20 min)
- workshop (1 hr, 45 min)

Virtual Convention Session Types

- presentation only (30-minute prerecorded session)
- presentation with Q&A (30-minute prerecorded session with 15-minute text Q&A)
- teaching tips (20-minute prerecorded session)

You may want to present alone, or, if you have coauthors, you may want to do a panel with multiple scholars. If you want to do a workshop, you would need to create tasks and activities for attendee participation. In this case, you will not be the only person talking throughout the session, and your proposal should include descriptions of how you will create this interaction during the workshop.

Step 5: Write the Session Description

You have 300 words to clearly state the goals of your session and to describe the methods or strategies you will use to achieve these goals, or to discuss the methods you utilized while doing your study and explain your relevant findings. Tips for your session description:

- Make sure your proposal is relevant to the conference theme and audience.
- Make sure your chosen context is parallel to the setting and audience your proposal most closely addresses. For example, if you conducted a study with 5-year-old students learning EFL in Turkey, then your setting and audience would be Early Childhood and your context would be EFL.
- Keep your proposal within the word limit (300 words), and spell out acronyms on first use unless they're on the approved acronyms list (page 3 of [this document](#)).

- Remember TESOL values regarding diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). It can help to check that your submission aligns with [TESOL's commitment to DEIA](#).
- **Instant Rejections:** Do not include your name, the names of institutions, or the names of your publications. Because the proposals are blind-reviewed, if you include this type of information, your submission will be rejected.

Once you've written it, carefully proofread your session description; make sure it's free of errors and typos.

- **Power Tip:** After you've written your session description, go back to Step 2 and review the strand description you chose once more: Make sure you're in the right strand!

Step 6: Write Your Title and Abstract

Write a clear and concise title that accurately reflects the content of the proposal you've written, and draft your abstract, highlighting the main points of your proposal.

- **Power Tip:** Rate your proposal! Check out the [Proposal Rating Rubric](#) to self-assess your proposal before submitting it. Does it meet all the criteria in the rubric? Did you include all the important components? What's missing?

In Closing

My graduate students followed these steps and found them very useful. Ten of them submitted proposals, and seven were accepted in 2019 after following these steps! I was delighted to receive positive feedback on these tips from my students, and I wanted to share them with you. I hope you will find my tips useful and follow them in submitting your proposals.

Please contact me with your feedback if you use these steps so that I can revise, update, and make the process better for future learners or participants. I am looking forward to interacting with the TESOL community again at the upcoming TESOL convention. Good luck with your proposal drafts!

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