

# WATESOL Fall Conference

## Progress through Professionalism

Saturday, November 13th, 2010

### Conference Proposals FAQ

#### **1. How do you get ideas for proposals?**

I approach this reflectively and socially. What have I been putting a lot of thought/energy into over the past year? What portion of this thought/work has been innovative? The answer to this second question comes from sharing ideas/practices with colleagues along the way; I listen to the feedback I'm getting, and this helps me notice potential presentation topics.

– Karen Taylor

I get ideas from activities that have worked well in my classes and from issues that I wish someone would present about.

– Catharine Hannay

Usually, I think about class goals that have been achieved successfully through development of a specific syllabus. I then break down the syllabus into easy to understand modules to show teachers how to approach the planning. I have done this for several poster sessions at TESOL and then turned the material into a presentation for WATESOL.

- Renee Feather

The most important way I get ideas for proposals is by brainstorming with colleagues: the back and forth helps a lot to clarify topics that might interest others (and helps me remember what I was working on in the past year!) – Carol Rommett

There's another important way I get ideas for proposals, and that is by attending conferences like WATESOL! By attending presentations, learning about what others are doing and listening to participants' questions, I get a sense of what other teachers are interested in and what I might have to offer on a related topic at a future conference.

– Karen Taylor

#### **2. Do proposals need to be about something new and/or unique?**

Not necessarily. It could be something you've been doing for a long time but that's new to some of the people attending the conference. Or it could be a new "twist" on a familiar topic. In other words, a proposal needs to be about something \*potentially\* new to someone (e.g. a novice teacher who doesn't know much about innovative uses of cloze activities), and it needs to reflect your unique take on it (to differentiate it from something you might find in a book or an article on teaching techniques/ activities).

New teachers are always entering our profession, and we hope, joining WATESOL events! Even experienced instructors often face new challenges. That's why an acceptable topic may help fill the needs of some teachers, even if the same topic may seem basic or "old hat" to more experienced teachers. Also, since professional development is an ongoing process, even more experienced teachers can benefit from refreshers on certain topics. A "tried and true" topic can certainly be acceptable if it (1) addresses current needs and (2) reflects current "best practices" in our field.

Also, remember that the topic does need to be relevant to a wider audience, so in that sense it can't be unique to just one institution or one teaching situation. If the topic appears to be unique to just one setting, then the proposal needs to address clearly how the content of the presentation can benefit the wider audience from other settings.

#### **3. What are the pros and cons in working with a co-presenter?**

**Pros--** For novice presenters, having a more experienced co-presenter is great scaffolding; the novice presenter can see what goes into a good presentation, and the experienced presenter(s) can learn a lot from their role as

mentor if they are well organized and know how to delegate specific tasks.

For experienced presenters, working with a colleague you really see eye-to-eye with can be very rewarding; by working together, the topic can develop into something much greater than it was at its inception.

Collaboration could also work between two novice or first-time presenters. At the very least, two novice co-presenters can give each other feedback and certainly moral support and encouragement along the way.

Even if two presenters bring different styles to the preparation and delivery of a presentation, they can often complement each other, strengthening the presentation.

**Cons--** Even with a stellar co-presenter, it takes more work to put together a good presentation. The task load might be cut in half (divided between the presenters), but at least as much work is needed to synthesize everyone's take on the topic, organize the presentation, scheduling planning time, etc.

#### **4. Do I need a lot of experience before I can write my first proposal?**

**No--** Every year we get proposals from new teachers and teachers-in-training and many of them are accepted. So long as you have something to share, you are a potential presenter. Beyond that, it's about writing the proposal, and as long as you approach this as a learning experience, you have nothing to lose.

#### **5. Are there any tips you can give for writing successful proposals?**

- ◆ Clearly identify a problem/challenge/issue that your proposal addresses
- ◆ Remember that your topic needs to be relevant to other teachers
- ◆ Describe what will take place during the presentation: Do not just write a summary or abstract of the content, but rather describe the parts of the presentation, giving an overview of what the presenter will do in each part of the presentation.

- ◆ Create a title that accurately reflects the content of the presentation and corresponds to the content of the proposal.
- ◆ Allow time to draft, revise and revise again.
- ◆ Show it to a colleague
- ◆ Show it to a non-ESOL colleague (if they can't understand/envision what the proposal is about, that indicates a need for revision and clarification)
- ◆ Re-read your proposal many times before submitting it
- ◆ Save the proposals that you write as samples for writing future proposals

#### **6. What gets a proposal a high rating?**

- ◆ The sense that participants will walk away satisfied after the presentation
- ◆ Relevance to a high number of conference participants
- ◆ A realistic description of what will happen during the presentation
- ◆ Simplicity in the presentation of ideas
- ◆ Clear writing
- ◆ A "catchy" title
- ◆ Descriptions that reflect the title
- ◆ Following all the "rules" for submission

#### **7. Why are some proposals given a low rating?**

- ◆ Topic is too broad (Tips for Teaching ESOL) or too narrow (Teaching Reading to Fifth Graders through the Poetry of Robert Frost)
- ◆ The proposal is on a topic that is not related to TESOL.
- ◆ Title doesn't reflect content
- ◆ Not including a clear description of what will actually happen in the presentation
- ◆ Unclear or poor writing
- ◆ Poor editing
- ◆ The proposal does not follow the submission guidelines.

**Important point:** Some proposals with "good" ratings still might not be accepted as the committee must look at the conference as a whole and offer a diversity of programming options – in doing this, they will weigh similarity of proposals and the range of topics. **It's important for proposal writers not to get discouraged from trying again the next time!**