GRASSLAND SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

ANNUAL CONGRESS

Guidelines for Abstract Submissions

(Please also see presentation guidelines)

The Scientific Committee's main aim is to ensure a stimulating programme of platform presentations for the Congress. Abstracts submitted earlier will have a greater chance of being included in the platform paper programme, but the final criterion for acceptance of platform papers is quality and relevance to the audience. Posters will be given prominence at the venue and enough time will be allocated so that authors can explain their posters during the relevant sessions.

As a general guideline, platform papers should report findings of original research or novel synthesis and review of existing information. Very preliminary findings and research proposals should be presented as posters. The closer interaction with the audience that the research proposal poster session affords will facilitate discussion and feedback on these proposals, while the short presentations of standard posters during the relevant sessions will bring them to the attention of the delegates and allows time for brief discussion. When selecting papers for platform presentations, priority will be given to new findings and novel synthesis. The Scientific Committee who reviews abstracts may encourage changes from poster to platform presentations and *vice versa* based on the content of the abstract.

It is, therefore, essential that abstracts are as informative as possible about the aims, methods and key findings of the study. Excessively brief abstracts make it difficult to judge whether a paper is suitable for a platform presentation. When an abstract is too brief to judge the scope of the work to be presented, authors will be requested to expand them or change to a poster presentation.

PLEASE ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES:

1	Abstracts should be written in UK English of up to **500 words**.
2	Abstracts must consist of ONE paragraph only.
3	Text should be submitted using font Arial, size 12 point, left aligned and line-height of 150%.
4	Authors should use the Oxford comma for lists. Example: "Flowers, fruits, and seeds were measured."
5	The metric system as defined by the International System of Units applies. Abbreviations of units of measurement should be non-caps, e.g. hectare = ha. The International System of Units should be consulted where uncertain and for exceptions: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_System_of_Units
6	Abstracts should not contain subtitles, keywords, tables or figures.
7	A comma (,) should be used as thousand separator and dot (.) as decimal separator, e.g. 1,000,000 km² and 1.275 kg.

8	P-values and the like (*r*, *n*, etc.) should be written in lowercase and italics (*p*; html code). Spaces should be included before and after the equal (=), less than (<), or greater than (>) signs. Example: $p < 0.05$
9	A space should be included between values and measure units, e.g. 12 m; 17 km, 60 h; 250 kg; 16 °C. Exceptions are geographical coordinates (11°55'45"N) and angles (60°). No space should be included before percentage sign (15%, 17.5%).
10	Use proper symbols for multiplication (×) and intervals (–). Also notice that the unit measure should be placed after the figures when listing intervals and dimensions, e.g. 3 × 4.5–5.5 cm.
11	Use EN-dashes (–) when referring to geographic, temporal, or dimensional intervals and ranges, e.g. Zimbabwe–Mozambique highlands; June–September; 1–1.5 cm. There are no spaces on either side of m-dashes (—) and n-dashes (–). Example: "Grasslands—as other biomes—are under severe human pressure."; "Flower tubes from 14–20 cm".
12	The GSSA guideline of no more than three decimal places should be adhered to.
13	Common names can be included provided they are followed by the proper scientific name, e.g. quinine tree (*Rauvolfia caffra*). Authors of scientific names should be excluded as a space saving consideration both in the title and the body of the abstract.
14	Botanical family names should follow APG IV (Chase *et al*. 2016). Avoid the usage of informal names and outdated families (e.g. Asteraceae and not Compositae; Poaceae and not Gramineae).
15	The standard conventions for use of nomenclature of fauna, insects, etc. and other non-botanical disciplines should be adhered to as per those disciplines, but author names of genera and species should be omitted.
16	In abstract titles, the first word following a colon but not an EM-dash should be capitalised, e.g. Case study: Improving nitrogen fertiliser efficiency on pasture-based dairy farms OR Case study — improving nitrogen fertiliser efficiency on pasture-based dairy farms
17	Titles should not end in a full-stop and should all be lowercase unless any of the other guidelines here apply.
18	Acronyms – in first instance should be written out in full followed by acronym in brackets, e.g. Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME), mean annual precipitation (MAP).
19	Acronyms such as KALARIVA, etc. can be considered as standalone situations and can be used in titles without explanation providing explanation is included in the body of the abstract using the previous guideline.
20	Ampersands (&) should not be used; only "and" should be used.
21	Square brackets are permitted, but we encourage em-dashes rather than multiple hierarchies of parentheses; exceptions are mathematical formulae.
22	Province, district, river, etc. should be capitalised if part of a name, e.g. Limpopo River, Eastern Cape Province, Middelburg District, BUT river, province, district when not name specific.
23	After a genus name has been mentioned for the first time it can thereafter be summarised using the first letter and a full stop, e.g. *Themeda triandra* . . . *T. triandra*. The entire genus name must be

	spelled out at the beginning of a sentence.
24	Seasons: use lowercase for summer, winter, autumn, spring; use 'autumn' and not 'fall', given we are using UK English.
25	Points of the compass lowercase: north, south, east, west; also e.g. north-west, north-western etc. (hyphenated).
26	For versus should be abbreviated as vs (UK) not vs. (US).
27	Dates: Use e.g. 14th January not 14 January.
28	Latin terms should be italicised: *ad hoc, in situ, ex situ, sensu lato, sensu stricto,* etc.
29	No citations or references in the Abstracts, unless citing founding research as part of sentence (but not citation at end of sentence).
30	Use 'savanna' (or 'Savanna Biome') and not 'savannah'.
31	Formally circumscribed Biome and vegetation unit usage should be in capitals, if part of a formal national or global vegetation classification – e.g. Karoo Escarpment Grassland vegetation unit, or Grassland Biome, or Fynbos Biome, etc., as per Mucina and Rutherford (2006) for South Africa. However, general use of 'grassland', 'fynbos', 'savanna' should be employed if not specifically referring to a formally described Biome or vegetation unit – e.g. 'grassland vegetation in the Kruger National Park'.

Structure and Content of Abstracts

While abstracts, especially those of invited keynote speakers, vary in style, the following is a recommendation on how abstracts should be structured.

Scientific articles are usually written following the Scientific Format, and we recommend that abstracts follow this style. The abstract has a title, followed by authors, their affiliations and contact information, and then the body of the abstract. The body of the abstract does not contain any headings, but reflects several sections, namely Introduction, Aim, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion. These various sections are dealt with separately.

Title

The title is a brief description of the information that the author wishes to present. Titles should be as descriptive as possible but should remain relatively short. Some examples:

Title	Quality	Comments
Growth of two grasses.	Poor	This title gives very little information to the reader
Effects of nitrogen fertilization on the biomass production of *Themeda triandra* and *Eragrostis curvula*	Adequate	The title includes more information on the nature of the work (here, that nitrogen fertilizer was used, and biomass production was recorded), but does not give any information on the nature of the results. (In general, authors should avoid using "The effect(s) of …" in a title.)

Nitrogen fertilization increases biomass production of the southern African rangeland grasses *Themeda triandra* and *Eragrostis curvula*.	Good	The nature of the response is now clear, and the scope of the work is contextualised by noting that the grasses occur in southern African rangelands.

Authors and institutional affiliations

Provide the names of all authors. The author who will be making the presentation should be annotated with an asterisk (*). The presenting and corresponding author is usually the same person. The names of the institutions with which the authors are affiliated appear under the list of authors, with superscript numbering used if necessary. Some authors may have more than one institutional affiliation. For example:

Andrew B Cow[1,2*], Sipho Ndlovu[1], and Felicity Jakkals[3].

[1] Bovine Research Institute, Hereford.
[2] South African Cattle Research Centre, Beesfontein.
[3] Rooikat Research Centre, Tierfontein.

Introduction

An introduction is usually two or three sentences that provide a background and context to the work that has been done. After reading the introductory part of the abstract, a reader should have a clear idea of why the work was necessary, and why it was done. Complex studies may require significantly longer introductions, especially if there are many interactive factors determining various outcomes.

Aim

This component provides a clear account of the purpose of the research. It is usually phrased as an objective, a question, or a hypothesis. Note that the working hypothesis, not the statistical null hypothesis, should be used if a hypothesis is stated. Some examples:

Type	**Example**
Objective	The objective of this research was to determine whether fertilization with chelated iron would reduce the incidence of chlorosis in perennial ryegrass following grazing by sheep.
Question	We addressed the question “Can chelated iron fertilizers reduce the incidence of chlorosis in perennial ryegrass that has been grazed by sheep?”
Hypothesis	The hypothesis was that fertilization with chelated iron would reduce the incidence of chlorosis in perennial ryegrass following grazing by sheep.
INCORRECT: Statistical null hypothesis	The null hypothesis is that there would be no difference in the incidence of chlorosis in perennial ryegrass fertilized and not fertilized with chelated iron following grazing by sheep.

Depending on the nature and complexity of the research, an aim, objectives, and hypotheses might be appropriate.

Methods

The methods section describes how, and usually where, the research was conducted. If the aim of the research was addressed using an experiment, then an outline of the experiment should be given. Alternatively, sampling procedures or methods of analysis should be described. Some examples:

Type	Example
Experiment	The hypothesis was tested using a pot-experiment in a greenhouse. The experiment had two factors: water availability (low, medium, high) and nutrient availability (low, medium high), giving a total of nine treatments. Treatments were replicated five times giving a total of 45 pots, which were positioned in a fully randomised design. [Then give more details.]
"Natural" experiment	To test whether heavy grazing reduced forb diversity, we measured the density of forbs in each of 50 1x1 m quadrats at ten sites. Five of the sites had experienced heavy grazing by livestock for >70 years, three sites had experienced moderate grazing for >70 years, and livestock had been excluded from two of the sites for >200 years.
Data set	To test for a shift in rainfall patterns in the area, monthly rainfall records for the period 1875 to 2012 were analysed to search for trends (linear and polynomial regression analysis), periodicity (wave regression analysis), and state changes (segmented regression).

Results

The results section should highlight some of the main results of the study and should present actual values. It is usually useful to present some measure of variation and whether results were significant (e.g. sheep given a urea supplement weighed 36.5 ± 4.6 kg and control animals weighed 34.9.5 ± 4.1 kg (P=0.43)). However, full test statistics (F-values, degrees of freedom, etc) should not be reported. While it is appropriate to present some results, the abstract should not contain too many results for a reader to assimilate. Authors should avoid including tables and figures just to add content to their abstract.

When describing a difference between two treatments, try to describe the nature of that difference. For example, rather than saying "fertilized and unfertilized plants had significantly different growth rates", say "fertilized plants grew significantly faster than unfertilized plants".

Note that abstracts that refer to results but do not actually contain results will not be accepted as either poster or platform presentations (e.g. "Results will be discussed", etc). If for some reason authors have not analysed their data by the time abstracts have to have been submitted, it would be better to request an extension from the Congress Organiser, note this extension on the submitted abstract and ensure that the full abstract is submitted by the date agreed.

Discussion and conclusion

The discussion is usually one to several sentences linking the results to the aim (and hence introduction). The conclusion is a simple statement that informs the reader what the authors' final decision on the research was. When providing a conclusion, it is important not to a) confuse a conclusion with a summary of results, or b) overstate the importance of the conclusion. For example:

Section	Example
Introduction	*Seriphium plumosum* is an unpalatable shrub that invades grasslands in South Africa. However, the shrub is reported to have a relatively high protein content and has not been shown to be toxic. Therefore, it is possible that animals can be forced to graze *S. plumosum* by reducing the amount of alternative food available by increasing stocking rates. This would be a way of controlling the shrub.
Aim	The aim of this research was to determine the extent to which oxen will graze *Seriphium plumosum* along a stocking rate gradient.
Results	There was a linear inverse relationship between plant height after grazing and stocking rate. Ungrazed and heavily grazed plants were 35 ± 7.9 cm and 16 ± 4.9 cm in height, respectively. Similar trends were evident for plant volume (21.6 ± 6.69 dm^{-3} and 11.1 ± 3.69 dm^{-3}, respectively).
Discussion	As expected, animals did increase their intake of *S. plumosum* as the availability of alternative forage decreased. The linear relation suggests that this was a direct feed substitution, and that animals did not have to overcome an innate aversion to the shrub before starting to consume it.
Good conclusion	We conclude that heavy stocking with oxen may be a useful control measure for *S. plumosum*.
Poor conclusion (summary of results)	We conclude that the height and volume of S. *plumosum* plants decreased as stocking rate increased.
Poor conclusion (overstating the importance)	We conclude that all *S. plumosum* invasions can easily be controlled by increasing the stocking rate of oxen. This will increase veld productivity in South Africa and will lead to increased income for farmers, and an upturn in the agricultural and general economy.

Compiled by: Freyni du Toit for the Grassland Society of Southern Africa