

## Tips for Writing an Effective Thumbnail Description

There's nothing worse than walking into a roomful of empty seats at your presentation session. It's important to remember that most conference attendees have to make session choices based only on a short description in the program.

Even if a session's content is spectacular, if its program description is boring or sounds less than valuable, attendees are likely to skip it.

At a time when budgets are tight and attendees are more focused than ever on the return on their investment of attending a conference, it's essential that the program explicitly describe the value you're planning to deliver. One of the most obvious ways to do that is to revisit your program copy to make sure it's tightly written and focused on value.

Each session description should be based on educational objectives, or brief statements of the session's goals. Objectives should explain the intent of the session and should be expressed in a way that tells potential attendees what they'll be able to do after the session is over.

According to a tip sheet prepared by Molson Medical Informatics, well-written educational objectives should meet the following criteria:

- They are learner-oriented.
- They give a description of the desired learning outcome.
- They are clear and understandable.
- They are observable.

Learner-oriented, or learner-centered, objectives focus on what the attendee will be able to do, as opposed to what the session or instructor intends to do. For instance, "to explain the four methods of constructing a surface" is a speaker-oriented objective. But "to use the four methods of constructing class A surfaces in designing their products" is a learner-oriented objective.

Desired learning outcomes are what attendees will be able to do after participating in a particular session. The focus should not be on what the attendee will be doing during the session, but on actions that will be possible afterwards. For instance, "to participate in a discussion about budgeting" is not an outcome-based objective, but "to make informed budgeting decisions" is.

Learning objectives that are clear and understandable must be explicit, with a clearly stated verb that describes a definite action or behavior. The desired learning outcome should leave no room for possible misinterpretation. For example, "to know the signs of an economic downturn" is vague, but "to recognize, identify, and articulate the signs of an economic downturn" is more precise.

Finally, a well-written session objective must be observable, which means you can measure the success of the program by observing the actions that are possible after its conclusion. An observable objective usually includes a verb that requires a specific action be taken. Examples of observable verbs include: identify, list, add, choose, predict, draw, and analyze. Examples of non-observable or vague verbs are: know, appreciate, think, and realize. "To understand the use of the Web as a marketing tool" is vague and difficult to measure, but "to explain how the Web can be used to market a particular product" is observable.

## Verb Power

When writing educational objectives to help sell your meeting's educational sessions, it's crucial to use verbs that represent measurable, observable actions. Begin your objectives with this phrase: "At the end of this session, attendees will be able to ...". Then use the following list to help you get started filling in the blank with action verbs.

analyze describe explain operate  
articulate determine identify organize  
create develop list quantify  
decide distinguish manage recognize