To begin this process, you must first take stock of the research essays you have already written and evaluate which ones you want to make use of professionally. Though some essays that received “B” or “C” grades can be revised and improved, you don’t want to submit an abstract for a CFP if the essay it describes requires extensive work and new research, as this can distract you from other commitments and intensify the stress of conference presentations or the publication process.

[Quick tip: Keeping all your undergraduate and graduate writing in folders on your computer or USB drive by class name (i.e. four completed essays that have been graded by a teacher and then corrected by you afterwards using teacher comments and criticisms in a folder labeled “UCWR 110”) will guarantee that you have lots of material to choose from when building your professional credentials.]

Choose essays that received good grades, had something new to prove that would be interesting to professionals in the academic field, and that relate to the profession you wish to enter. For instance, if you want to be a teacher, you might want to utilize an essay written on how to incorporate new online teaching aids like Prezi or Panto into classroom pedagogy. To “place,” or “find a home” for this piece of work, look for a publication or conference whose Call for Papers (CFP) relates in some way to your work.

A CFP is a notice sent out via listserv and/or email by a university, conference, organization, peer-reviewed journal or other writing publication, or academic or professional seeking to edit a volume of essays, seeking papers written on a topic which can be broadly or narrowly defined. Subjects are as vast as global Academia itself; possible topics could be “Artificial intelligence and the death of the human,” “new perspectives on alt-ac jobs and adjuncting,” “impact of the Crimean War on 19th century British poetry,” “genetic illness and the scientific and legal ethics of gene-editing,” etc.

To find a CFP that relates to your work, start by searching the CFP listservs and lists of conferences and journals located on the LUC Writing Center website or performing a Google search with your search terms (i.e. “conference,” “dangers of technology,” etc.) Also, consult your academic advisors or previous and current teachers in your field when trying to locate reputable conferences or publications. Since such individuals have successfully become professional experts within your academic field, their knowledge of the process could be invaluable to you. Sometimes older professors may not be aware of recent changes to the conventions, or presentation or publication process within your field, but their knowledge of ideal professional trajectories, academic and institutional histories, and disciplinary practices is often essential to know.

[Things to watch out for: While topics outside of your area of interest or expertise are undoubtedly fascinating, it is an unwise idea to submit an abstract for a CFP if you don’t know anything about the subject. You will appear to be an ignorant upstart without either an expert perspective or useful information to contribute to resolving often heavily-debated research questions. Also, before submitting an abstract to any organization, do research to find out if it has a positive or negative professional reputation in your academic field. You don’t want to
publish an article in a journal, only to find out that it is a scam and your important research has been wasted.]

Your ultimate goal when trying to “place” a work should be to:

1) Find CFPs that match preexisting or upcoming research that you have completed or will attempt before the date of the conference or publication date mentioned in the CFP.
2) Submit clear, concise abstracts relevant to the topic that are accepted.
3) Write and submit short (7-10 pg.) essays that will either be presented at a conference, or long (25+pg.) essays that will be published in a journal or volume.
4) Be courteous and keep to all deadlines and incorporate the advice of professionals (your teachers and professionals responding to and critiquing your work).
5) Update your CV or resume with the details of your presentation or publication.

To begin writing your abstract you must firstly fully understand what kind of papers the CFP is asking for, what the guidelines are (due date for abstract, method of sending the abstract, such as email, the name of the person receiving your abstract, etc.). Generally, as specified in the CFP, the length of an abstract ranges between 150 to 350 words and should briefly outline what the individual’s paper seeks to prove, what evidence it incorporates, and its overall relevance to the academic or professional field at large [see “How to Write and Submit an Abstract”].

Once you have written your abstract, follow all the CFP’s guidelines on how to submit your abstract. In the body of your email, briefly address the professor or individual receiving (and usually in charge of the process of accepting or rejecting!) your abstract, mention that your abstract is attached and include your paper title, and then close by thanking them for considering your work and asking them to inform you if anything else is required. The tone of this message should be courteous, humble, and brief. After you have submitted your abstract, you will usually receive an acknowledgement of receipt from the professor or individual and a deadline by which you should hear back. Refrain from emailing the professor and asking when the decision will be made as this can guarantee that your abstract is not accepted due to your unprofessional behavior!

In the meantime, feel free to locate and respond to other CFPs, while ensuring that your attempts to build your professional CV or resume by publishing and presenting your research do not conflict with or hinder your academic studies and personal life. Typically, it is considered bad form to present the same paper at multiple conferences or submit the same paper to multiple publications (some journals specifically forbid this practice). Instead, try to have several essays (3 or more) that you can improve, revise, and submit to several venues per year. Workshopping these papers with peers can help ready them for the CFP submission process, as can making an appointment with the LUC Writing Center to ensure that you understand the CFP and have composed an excellent and informative abstract in response.