What makes a good BIEE abstract?

The abstract needs to give the committee enough information to decide that your paper is worth presenting at the BIEE conference. The first paragraph should therefore make it clear what question you are addressing, and show why it is an important one. Remember that the BIEE audience consists of academic economists and practitioners in industry, government and professional firms.

While this is the BIEE’s research conference, a paper that is too narrowly focused on improving the academic tools of energy economics, without showing how they might be applied to real-world issues, is less likely to appeal to the committee than one which goes on to address a practical question. It is important, however, that all papers are based on an appropriate kind of rigorous analysis.

You may want to set your work in context by stating what others have already done. This can reassure the reader that you are on top of your subject area, but don’t give the impression that your presentation will be simply a literature review. It may be sensible to refer to key works in the text in a format such as Keynes’ General Theory (Macmillan, 1936) or the IS-LM model (Hicks, Econometrica, 1937) which doesn’t use all the space of full bibliographic details but will allow someone to find the relevant paper much more easily than simply writing Hicks (1937). (This is also worth thinking about when creating presentation slides.) Don’t use too much of the space for setting the scene, as we want to know what you are going to do.

Since we are looking for rigorous analysis, you may well want to use a paragraph to show why your analysis is at an appropriate level, and of the right type for the question you are studying. This might be done with a brief description of your modelling techniques, or the econometric methodology that you are following – it is unlikely to be necessary to give us equations. In a more qualitative paper, a few sentences summarising the argument (or illustrative parts of it) may well be all that you would have space for.

Describe the results that you have and what their implications are. Sometimes a picture or table is valuable, and can be fitted into the available space, while remaining legible. Remember that the abstract may be printed in black and white, and coloured diagrams need to work in greyscale.
A conference that makes acceptance decisions based on abstracts allows for the possibility that the research is not yet complete. This has the advantage that we will receive the latest results, and the disadvantage that there is a risk that the results will turn out less interesting (or harder to produce) than you hoped – you are the person whose reputation will suffer if this is the case. We regard it as acceptable to submit an abstract based on research in progress, but you must make it clear that this is what you are doing. A sentence such as “the results (to be obtained) will show whether policy X has the claimed impact” is one way of making the status of your work clear.

The committee may need to choose between papers, not just on the quality and interest of the underlying work, but also on whether it is likely to make a good presentation. A rigorous study of the amount of wind energy that could be produced in every local authority area of the UK, with thirty pages of tables promised, may be an excellent resource for energy economists in all of the BIEE’s constituencies, but would be hard to present in an attractive manner – unless some implications of the estimates were included, for example. Finally, please keep to a single page – otherwise, how will we know you can keep to time when presenting?