

Chapter-30

How to Write a Good Poster which has Impact and advantages of presentation in Poster Session

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The academicians have two options to communicate with their colleagues, one is to get their research published in journals and the other is to present it at conferences. Both also have certain advantage. While most of the mistakes made during presentation can be rectified later, once you get something published, it is not so easy.¹ The research work is also presented as a poster at the conferences and some of the conference organizers also provide few minutes for presentation during a poster session to the participants. Hence, it is important that the poster you prepare must have an impact.

While preparing a poster one has to create pages which have to be mounted for display in the conference hall but it also requires writing the narratives, preparing handouts and anticipating the questions one may be asked during the session. Posters lie in between as they are more detailed than speech but less than a paper. While preparing the poster an attempt should be made to tell the story in a simple manner but clearly. Make sure that the audience and visitors to the poster gallery understand why your work could be of interest to them, it should have clear take home message so that they can grasp it in few minutes which they spend at your poster.²

While designing a poster the first and most important principle is to determine the shape and size for which the guidelines from the conference organizers should be consulted

and followed. Carefully look at the size limitations for the poster, any restrictions regarding format and are you expected to present all the specifics of your study in the poster. Finally find out if your abstract will be included in the handout for the conference participants.³

Steven M. Block has written about Do's and Don'ts of Poster Presentation which is extremely useful and helpful.³ Remember occasionally one may break with traditions which could pay off but it is not always the case, hence one has to follow the well-established principles. Title should be short and on target which should highlight the subject matter. Type face used for the title must be large enough so that it is easily readable, if you find it difficult reduce the words in the title but do not reduce the Font size. Do not use capital letters in the title as it is difficult to read. Write the name of the authors and their institutional affiliations just under the title, the type face used for the authors names should be a bit smaller than title. Do not use too small type face for your poster, at least the font size must be twenty used in the text. Select a type face and font which is easily readable. If need be one can use Helvetica type face for title which can accommodate more words.

Always use high quality laser printer for poster printing and do not use matrix printers. Select fonts and sizes which work together well. The poster should be designed in such a way that the reader does not have to jump all over the poster to follow the presentation and get the message it contains. Be extremely careful while using colours, graphics because they do attract attention but they can also distract from the message. Try to use colours in the poster in a way that helps to convey additional message besides serving to make useful distinctions.

The poster should be split in various sections. To start with it should have a structured Abstract which should give complete message which it should convey in conclusions. Legends of pictures, figures should be brief and clear. The poster should be kept short and simple following the KISS terminology (Keep It Short and Simple). The information it must contain includes what is the question, what is its significance, How your study

addresses the question, what is your strategy, the experiment performed meaning what did you actually do and what did you find out? The conclusions should state what does it mean? Give credit to those who deserve in acknowledgements.⁴

Writing and Designing a Poster:

Please remember “Posters are enlarged, graphical presentation of research data. The abstract represents citable references and it also ensures rapid publication. The advantages of posters are that they can be viewed at leisure time, offers personal contact with the author. They are more comprehensive than an oral presentation. They can also be more memorable than a talk. Their value can be prolonged through hand-outs and it can also be a fun. However, it also has some disadvantages as the viewer is not comfortably seated. It is easy for the viewer to walk away. If a poster is dull, the viewer may switch off. It is time consuming to produce and at times it is also difficult to decide what to left out. Oral presentation is rated highly as compared to poster presentation. The writer should try to be brief.

If the poster is brief, structured, good appearance, has better title, lay out is good and conclusions are highlighted, it will have an impact. Most common complaints regarding posters is the use of too small type face or difficult to read, including too much un-necessary data, confusing organization, lack of headings and the information provided is not newsworthy. Some of the key steps in planning poster once the abstract has been accepted are to write the poster text. Have proper lay out. Find out what does the abstract say, what results are available, who is your target audience, when the poster is to be presented? As regards general principles of poster text, one should ensure maximum use of white space, remove non-essential information, use abbreviations, and use the active voice, use tables and figures to replace words, have short sentences and use bullets. Write in defined sections and there should be emphasis on results. Write Methodology and Results first. About 10% should be introduction, 15% methods, figures 2%, Results 25%, tables 2%, Discussion 30%,

conclusions 10% and references 5%. Title should be clear, concise with less than ten words. For authorship follow ICMJE guidelines listing upto six authors and then write et al.

Introduction in poster should be brief and relevant, limit the information, ask pertinent questions, and use present tense. Poster has to be short and convey the message. In the methods section, include only essential information, describe design. State the results factually without commentary and interpretation, direct the reader to tables and figures and use past tense with short sentences. Poster contents should be brief and relevant. In references list first author and then et al. if space is limited, limit to relevant references, simplify tables, answer question posted in the introduction, give presenter contact with e mail and write poster number. Size of the poster should be as per instructions. Poster must be eye catching, be creative, use colours and unusual format, and locate tables and figures near relevant text, use upper and lower case type. For title use 30-36 point type font, for authors 30 point bold, body text 20 point and not bold. While reviewing the poster detect errors, inappropriate and poor writing, improve its quality and increase the likelihood of good response. Make sure that the written piece is suitable for a poster, is it suitable for target audience, does it include the right message and does it have appropriate contents. Be clear, concise and avoid un-necessary details^{5,6} Contents and visual of the poster both are important. Resist the temptation to include too much information in the poster.

Poster Presentation

Do not stand directly in front of your poster in the hall where the posters are on display. Never get too close to it either. Do not remain too busy in conversation with one individual which accidentally prevents others from viewing your poster. Make sure to stick around your poster and be prepared to answer any questions. While standing near your poster make eye contact with people who approach you, allow them to finish reading it before engaging them in conversation. Have some reprints,

handouts of your poster ready for those who wish to have more information. Have your business cards ready to share with those who are interested. Do not hesitate to provide some supporting material if they can be of some help but refrain from over doing it. You can always consider some kind of attention getting gimmicks but be careful it should not backfire.⁴

Advantages of making Poster Presentations

Participating in a poster session and poster presentation offers many advantages. For the junior faculty members, it provides an opportunity to develop a national reputation, interaction with academia and promotion in academic medicine. If your poster is accepted for presentation, it enables you to get funding, travel grant. One should choose the right meeting for submission of the poster. Looking at the last year's accepted abstracts which could be very helpful. Prepare talking points for poster presentation. Additional benefits include Networking and collaboration, job promotion, it helps in finding new jobs while it will also be very helpful in preparing the final manuscript to be submitted for publication in a journal.

While making a presentation in a poster session, remember usually the speaker is given five to six minutes or maximum of ten minutes. Those judging the quality of posters in a competition look at importance of the study, quality of its contents, quality of slides and its presentation, style of presentation whether the presenter maintained eye contact with the audience, use the points in the slides to convey the message but do not read the slides and finally be mindful of timing which also has some points.

Most posters these days are one-piece glossy prints from graphics. Developments in printing technology have made it easy and once the poster is ready, it takes just few minutes to get it printed. Some conferences overseas also provide on-site printing facilities for the posters but it is always better to get it printed and have it ready with you.⁷

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