

Creating an Effective Poster Presentation

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Many of you may be considering a poster presentation or have already submitted an abstract for the PENS convention. Posters are an important method of communicating scientific information. They are a unique hybrid between published papers and oral presentations. During poster presentations, nurses have the opportunity to convey their findings while interacting with their colleagues in a more relaxed environment. There is no single recipe for a successful poster presentation, but I hope this article will provide some useful tips.

PLANNING AND PREPARING YOUR POSTER

Once your abstract is accepted, it is important to begin planning your poster. If it is your first poster, consider starting your poster 6 to 8 weeks prior to the presentation date. You need to allow time for writing the text, determining the layout, adding graphics, securing peer review, editing ruthlessly, printing your poster, and possibly shipping.

The first step is to review the guidelines from the organizing committee. Poster instructions and specifications, including physical dimensions, layout (landscape or portrait), and poster judging criteria (nursing research or case presentation) are usually included in your acceptance letter. The poster type (nursing research, case presentation, product-based research, or informational) will dictate its components. Plan your poster using the same headings as in the PENS abstract and poster guidelines.

An effective poster uses visual grammar. One way to lay out the sections for left-to-right flow is 2 to 4 vertical columns with symmetrical spacing. The title should be visualized at 20 feet to catch the viewer's eyes and interest; major headings should be visualized at 6-10 feet; other elements need to be visualized from 4 feet away. Use a font that is easily read, such as Arial, Times New Roman, or Century Schoolbook. Don't distract viewers by using too many fonts, font sizes, or colors. Incorporate graphical elements (charts, tables, figures, or photographs) to help illustrate key points of your poster but keep them as simple as possible.

To select the content for your poster, use only the most essential information from your wealth of knowledge on the topic. You must convey the key points about your topic and show why it is interesting and important in a clear and succinct way. In this situation, less is usually more. Include what the audience **MUST KNOW**, add some **GOOD-**

TO-KNOW information, and save the **NICE-TO-KNOW** information as talking points during your poster presentation or on a handout. Limiting the information may be the most challenging aspect of the poster development process. The audience must be able to view and process the information within five minutes. The poster must gain attention as the audience passes by and also be able to stand alone when you are not present.

When writing the conclusions, interpret the results and express their significance and clinical implications. Make the strongest statements that your data will support. Keep your messages simple and memorable. Provide viewers with a clear take-home message. Be sure to provide references where applicable as well as any acknowledgements. Include author contact information on your poster so interested viewers can follow up with you after the convention.

Seek advice from peers and the PENS Research Committee members as needed throughout the poster preparation process. It is helpful to solicit a critique from colleagues on the clarity of your message as well as the overall visual appeal of your poster. Allow enough time for them to review and make suggestions, and then you should edit and finalize your poster. Keep your poster professional in its appearance and free of grammar and spelling errors.

Many institutions have graphic designers and/or templates for posters so check with your colleagues, public relations or professional development departments. Many websites also offer templates to assist in preparing exciting and informative posters (refer to Resources). You may want to preview your poster on the computer from which it will be printed to avoid unexpected graphic problems and save money. Your institution may be able to print your poster or may recommend a local printing vendor. An online printing service may also be used.

PRESENTING YOUR POSTER

Your poster is prepared, and now it is time to showcase your work. Poster tubes are relatively inexpensive and will protect your poster during travel. Bring any necessary items with you to secure your poster to the frame, such as push pins, tape, Velcro. Supplemental handouts or 8 ½" X 11" or 8 ½" X 14" copies of your poster are a nice "take away" reinforcement of your message. Don't forget to bring some business cards. Make note of when to set up your poster, when you need to be present, and when to take down your poster.

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You will stand by your poster during the session to discuss your research, case study, or project with viewers. Although poster sessions are generally relaxed, maintain your professionalism, greet the convention attendees with a smile, and show enthusiasm for your work. You must constantly adapt to the viewers who are present. Some will merely want to look for a brief time to determine interest or relevance to their practice. Others will want an oral explanation and will ask questions. Prepare several versions of your remarks ahead of time, ranging from 30 seconds to 5 minutes. Try to anticipate what questions may be asked and how you will answer them. Be prepared to summarize the key points and conclusions in 2-3 sentences. Practice communicating your main messages in an effective and concise manner. Interacting with poster viewers requires thinking on your feet and using your social skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Posters presentations are increasingly used at nursing conventions as a method to disseminate research findings, case presentations, and new ideas to colleagues. Simple, direct, and concise posters are effective communication tools. Meticulous planning and preparation are keys to a successful poster presentation. It is a nice way to network with endocrine colleagues and share knowledge. Feel free to contact members of the Research Committee if you have any questions or need assistance. Remember to apply for a scholarship to help with convention expenses if you are eligible. The application is on the PENS website. Good luck with your poster!

RESOURCES

Poster Templates and Other Resources

<http://www.postersession.com/>

PowerPoint Templates for Large Format Posters

Wake Forest University

<http://www.wfubmc.edu/creative/send+and+receive+files/poster+templates.htm>

Poster Design Templates

Rice University

<http://www.owl.net.rice.edu/~cainproj/templates.html>

Creating Posters Using PowerPoint

<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/powerpoint-help/create-effective-posters-for-medical-presentations-HA001227642.aspx>

Creating Poster Presentations

George R. Hess (North Carolina State University)

Kathryn W. Tosney (University of Miami)

Leon H. Leigel (Oregon State University)

<http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/NewSite/>

Poster Design Guidelines and Resources

Stanford University

http://ual.stanford.edu/OO/research_opps/SURPSResources.html

Advice on Designing Scientific Posters

Swarthmore College

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm>

How to Make a Great Poster

American Society of Plant Biologists

<http://www.aspb.org/education/poster.cfm>

Designing Effective Posters

University of Kansas

http://www.kumc.edu/SAH/OTEd/jradel/Poster_Presentations/PstrStart.html

SUGGESTED READINGS

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