



Education for Primary Care

ISSN: 1473-9879 (Print) 1475-990X (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tepc20>

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Adesh Ramsewak

To cite this article: Adesh Ramsewak (2012) Create a poster presentation, Education for Primary Care, 23:5, 360-361, DOI: [10.1080/14739879.2012.11494140](https://doi.org/10.1080/14739879.2012.11494140)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14739879.2012.11494140>



Published online: 07 Oct 2015.



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How to . . .

Create a poster presentation

Adesh Ramsewak MBBS MRCP
Cardiology Registrar, Wales Deanery, UK

INTRODUCTION

A poster presentation can display scientific work, case presentations or medical education data. It is used to deliver a message or finding and is a testament to the saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words' as it translates robust work into a shortened graphic form, often on a single slide.

Posters are popular at scientific conventions, medical conferences or meetings; mastering its production and display will prove invaluable to one's career. It will help enhance your CV, assist in networking and can get your research, data or information recognised. However, creating a poster is no walk in the park; it is a task that is challenging and requires great knowledge and skill in compressing data.

PRODUCING A POSTER PRESENTATION

There are several factors to consider, some may think these are trivial but attention to detail will enhance reader engagement and make the poster more professional and competitive.

Some cardinal rules would be to determine the purpose of your poster. Know your target group or audience as they will be judging your work, consider their judging criteria and be aware of your competition. It is a competitive arena, one in which you will wish to shine. The scientific conference or meeting concerned may have design specifications to which you should conform to in order for your poster to be eligible for display. So it is important to liaise with the programme coordinator to ensure that you understand the rubric and comply with it.

Determine from the organiser the exact location, the required size of poster for display and dimensions of the poster board. Be aware of the setup and removal times, some programmes have pre-assigned numbers with predetermined arrangements on poster boards. Do not leave your work beyond your allotted time as this may result in it being taken down and disposed. Enquire if you are required to provide an accompanying oral presentation, if this is required one should know the time and location, often it is on the same day that your poster is on display. Some

meetings may only require selected posters to be orally presented, with others which could not be fitted into the oral presentation slots still placed on display allowing more material to be covered in the program. Many also require that you stand alongside your poster for specific times during the meeting to address any questions.

During the conference there will be attendees walking around, mulling over your poster before as well as after your presentation. Creating an attractive poster that makes one want to take a second look is important. This will encourage them to read its content and by succinctly presenting your data readers may become interested creating further discussion. The poster is intended to be an overview of a more detailed article and as such, it should be clearly set out with a shortened written account that viewers are able to read within 5–10 minutes gaining sufficient information to encourage interest. Graphs, diagrams, flow charts and tables all serve to help readers easily comprehend your message.

The poster layout should be in a similar structure as a scientific article unless otherwise specified by the conference and it should be referenced accordingly. In general the poster should contain the following sections: Title, Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion with summary or conclusion and References. Be certain to include all authors' disclosure information and ensure that it is visible to attendees viewing the poster. The Title is displayed at the top and should include a name of topic, its authors and any institutional affiliations or acknowledgements. The Introduction should follow containing background information on the topic commenting on existing knowledge. It should highlight any missing gaps and state what is your aim or hypothesis. The Methods should address the research design and setting, number of patients enrolled and selection criteria. For a clinical study it should describe the intervention, the outcome and statistical analysis used. The Results should be brief, make it easy to read and understand. Be careful not to detract with too much variation in the colour, the illustrations and the style and size of the font, as you want to impress on your viewers your data or research information. Visual attraction is enhanced with few colours, graphs, short text and presentation of only facts. Lengthy explanation can be left for discussion after the presentation or in a journal article. In the Discussion section state

concisely what can be concluded from the study and its implications. Make sure that the conclusions are supported by the data presented in the results and do not present unsubstantiated personal opinion. Do not forget your references, which can usually be written in a smaller font at the bottom of the poster.

The main title should be easily read, a font size of 72 in Times New Roman or Arial is recommended.¹ A smaller size but a consistent use of font style is used for section headings and the main body of the piece. The conference co-ordinators should inform you of any formatting requirements. Once you are aware of the necessary format, economy on words is then important. One method to achieve this is by first writing the poster as a PowerPoint presentation and then fitting each slide together. Another technique is to put various text boxes in one slide and then re-arranging them to ensure that you have an aesthetically pleasing display with appropriate background and font colour and size.

The body of the text should be readable from 1.2–1.8 m away as most individuals will be viewing your results at this distance.¹ The font size of 20–24 point is recommended and again Times New Roman or Arial style should be used. The thickness of each text letter should be either medium or bold thickness. One should keep to one or two font styles and adhere to a simple colour scheme to avoid detracting from the content of the presentation. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that whilst font size, style and colour are the tools that help to grab your audience's attention, it is the content that will sustain interest. Proportional spacing is equally as important as it adds simplicity to the posters layout again in keeping with the code of easy legibility.

Get someone to proofread and critique your poster design, this can help identify any typographical or factual errors and can address any design issues

before submitting to print. It is advantageous to predetermine your print facility as many have limitations which can impact on your poster design. It is also wise to allocate ample time for printing to avoid delays being late.

CONCLUSION

In summary, know your audience; contact the conference co-ordinators to determine formatting, times for display and presentation if necessary and ensure you adhere to any specified guidelines. Review your work and ask someone to critique it, even presenting to your department will assist you in fine-tuning your poster and give you practise presenting and anticipating any questions.

Good luck and enjoy your time in the spotlight.

References

- 1 Smaldino SE, Lowther DL and Russell JD (2008) *Instructional Technology and Media for Learning 9/e*. New Jersey: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.
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- 3 Speakers and Presenters Guidelines Heart Failure (2012). Available at: www.escardio.org/congresses/HF2011/scientific/Pages/speakers-guidelines.aspx#PP (accessed 11/12/11).

Adesh Ramsewak is a Cardiology SpR with the Wales Deanery, currently completing an Interventional Fellowship in Belfast. He has a special interest in medical education and teaching.