

Poster Presentation Tips

A poster presentation is an excellent way to gain valuable experience presenting your work to peers and colleagues one-on-one. Many students present posters at their first conference as a way to learn about the conference experience without the stress of giving a talk in front of a big audience. But don't be fooled -- poster presentations are hard work! Posters should be prepared carefully and then presented professionally.

For those of you who are new to conference presentations, here are some tips to help improve the quality of your poster presentation:

1. A poster is not simply a research report tacked up on the wall. Don't think that you can simply print out and display a paper you wrote -- not only is the small font difficult to see but papers typically contain too much information for people to take in during a poster session. Indeed, most people at the conference will not want to stand and read your poster -- they expect you to "walk them through" your research, using the poster as an illustration of main points, findings and conclusions.
2. Choose carefully what information to display. A poster should include the basic elements of an APA-style report: title, abstract, introduction, methods, results and discussion. But each section should include only the highlights of this material. (You should be prepared to give people the details verbally as you "walk them through" each part of your poster.) Where appropriate, provide figures illustrating your methods, and figures or tables summarizing your results. Good posters also usually include a "take home message" that is stated simply at the end.
3. Posters should be both easy to read and visually interesting. Use large font so that people standing a few feet away can easily see your main ideas or results. Make your poster colorful, and include illustrations, graphs, even photos of your experimental set-up, if appropriate. Remember not to include too much text; just hit the highlights and then plan on telling your peers the rest in a well-rehearsed script that you have practiced.
4. Don't be shy! Poster presentations offer the opportunity for one-on-one interaction with your colleagues, and you should take advantage of this. When people come by your poster, ask them if they would like you to tell them about it. Ask for suggestions, opinions, etc. not only about your research but about your career too. Professors and other students are great resources, and poster sessions provide a great opportunity to make new contacts and gather information.
5. Be professional. This is, after all, a professional conference ... so make sure you look and act the part. Dress nicely and be prepared to discuss your work with other researchers. Try to rotate co-authors so that one of you is present at your poster at all times during the poster session. Also, be sure to attend other talks and poster presentations, and to engage your peers in interaction.

6. How about a handout? Many conference-goers appreciate having a handout of your poster. This can be a one-page summary of the presentation or simply a small copy of the poster itself. Remember to include your name and contact information on the handout for those who have questions for you later. Prepare about 20 handouts.