Preparing a Poster Presentation

ACP Website:
http://www.acponline.org/residents_fellows/competitions/abstract/prepare/pos_pres.htm (Accessed 10/30/12)

Clinical vignette posters generally have three components: Introduction, Case Description, and Discussion. A short Introduction typically describes the context of the case and explains its relevance and importance. When describing the case, follow the basic rules of medical communication by describing in sequence the history, physical examination, investigative studies, and patient's progress and outcome. The main purpose of the discussion is to review why decisions were made and to extract the lesson from the case. Be wary of boasting that your case is the "first" to describe a particular phenomenon, since even the most thorough searches often fail to reveal all instances of similar cases. Keep in mind that the best research and clinical vignette posters are those that make a small number of points (even just one) clearly and succinctly.

As you review your content, make decisions on what can be displayed pictorially. Posters that are mainly text discourage others from visiting and reviewing your work. Make your presentation as visual as possible; not only does it make your poster more appealing, but information can be transmitted more efficiently with a picture, figure, or graph. For example, information on patient demographics could be represented as a pie chart, frequencies of outcomes as bar graphs, and comparisons of means and statistical significance as tables. Clinical vignettes offer an excellent opportunity to display clinical photographs that illustrate important points of pattern recognition.

Finally, find out if you are required to be present during the poster session. Most scientific meetings schedule a period of time for the author to stand by the poster during the session. This enables you to answer questions about your work and, in some situations, is part of the judging process. Find out if and when this is scheduled.

A Few Tips on Poster Appearance:

Avoid clutter.

Limit your poster presentation to a few main ideas. It's better to present a few of your findings well than present all of your findings poorly. Arrange your poster components to read from left to right and top to bottom. Emphasize important points on the poster with lines, frames or boxes, and arrows.

Keep the lettering simple.

Use no more than three different font sizes; the largest for the poster title, second-largest for section titles, and smallest for text. For all lettering, use both upper- and lowercase letters. Words
composed of all uppercase letters are difficult to read. The smallest font should be large enough
so it is easily read from a distance of 3 to 5 feet (usually, 24-point font).

Keep the colors simple.

Too much color can be distracting, while too little color can be boring and lifeless. Use color
mainly to highlight important elements.

You will need to decide how your poster will be constructed. Your budget and available graphic
art resources will most likely influence this decision. At one end of the spectrum, you can
inexpensively produce a poster with a graphics software package (such as PowerPoint) and a
color printer. Your output will be limited to individual components that measure 8" × 11" to 11"
× 17". These components will probably need to be mounted on a stiff backing, such as poster
board or foam core, to effectively display them. At the other, more expensive end of the
spectrum, you can work with the graphic arts department at your institution. They can use
sophisticated software programs, such as Quark, to design and create a poster. The electronic
version of the poster can be sent by e-mail to a printing or service bureau. Service bureaus
produce a variety of visual products including posters, slides, signs, and limited print editions of
books. They can print any size poster with all its component parts as a single unit usually within
24 to 48 hours. The cost of this service is difficult to estimate because it is dependent on a
number of variables including poster size, use of color, resolution of the print (dpi, or dots per
inch), whether it is laminated, or backed with foam core. A moderately priced poster may cost
from $500 to $600. The staff in your graphic arts department can help you pick the options that
are within your budget.

At the time of production, it is your responsibility to review the first draft, or copy, of the poster.
This is your best chance to correct errors and make changes to improve the accuracy and visual
attractiveness of the poster. Use the Poster Checklist to aid your review. In addition, have a
colleague help you proofread. It's a good idea to have someone unfamiliar with the research or
case help you because he or she will quickly identify areas that are confusing or ambiguous. It's a
good idea to have someone who is expert in spelling and grammar review the poster as well. As
mentioned previously, schedule the proofreading early enough in the process so that you have
time to make any corrections or changes prior to the meeting.

As you prepare to travel to the scientific meeting, consider the following tips:

- **Arrange for a proper carrying case for your poster.** A worthy investment can prevent
damage to your poster and your reputation.
- **Don't check your poster as luggage.** Carry the poster with you at all times. Better your
clothes get lost than your poster.
- **Know where and when to set up your poster.** The room or area reserved for posters is
usually noted in the meeting program. Arrive early to set up your poster. This will allow
you to adapt to any surprises in the physical layout or unannounced changes in the
method of displaying the poster. Additionally, it's easier to put up your poster when there
are fewer people competing for space and equipment. Most scientific programs assign a
unique identifying number to your poster that corresponds to location of the poster in the
display area. Find out what your number is and place your poster in the corresponding spot.

- **Know when to "stand-by" your poster.** The time will be listed in the meeting program. Arrive on time and stay until the end of scheduled time. Don't wander off; you may miss the judges, your next fellowship director, or your next partner or employer.
- **Know when to take your poster down.** Meeting rooms turn-over fast. Have a clear understanding when the poster session is over and when the poster must come down. Failure to take the poster down at the appointed time can result in the hotel or convention staff (not so gently) removing it.
- **Be prepared to promote yourself.** Consider bringing handouts and business cards for those who visit your poster. Use this opportunity to "network" with other professionals who share similar academic interests.

This final section provides examples of what makes a poster effective. As you study the examples, note that they share similar characteristics:

- Organized and easy to follow the flow of information
- Easy to read, using large font size and are not overly dense with text
- Attractive, due to judicious use of colors, use of graphics, and arrangement

Listed below are a number of important poster characteristics and examples illustrating those characteristics:

- Use of a poignant attention getter
- Use of graphics to communicate data
- Well organized poster with easy to follow flow of information
- Overly dense presentation of content