

Effective Poster Presentations

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Students and nurses in the workplace may be asked to do a presentation using a poster format. This article provides guidelines for creating an effective poster presentation.

Keywords: Poster, Presentation, Research

[DIMENS CRIT CARE NURS. 2008;27(3):122-124]

Poster presentations can be an effective means of communication. They serve as one way to disseminate research findings at professional meetings and in the workplace. New policies and procedures in the workplace can be made known through the use of posters. Students may be asked to develop a poster presentation as part of the requirements for a degree. Regardless of the reason, poster presentations are a good means of communication. This article will provide guidelines for creating an effective poster presentation in any setting.

■ WHY A POSTER?

As stated before, a poster presentation can be used to communicate information to many people. In today's healthcare climate of cost-effectiveness and time constraints, a poster presentation may be used to share information with staff. The poster may be set up in a unit or lounge area and can be transported to several units within a healthcare facility.¹ New policies and procedures, information concerning new equipment or professional issues, updated clinical information, and research findings may be presented to staff through a poster. A poster uses an easy-to-read format for presenting information.²

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Historically, poster presentations have been used to present research findings and new clinical information

at professional meetings.^{3,4} It is important to realize that posters may be used also to present research findings to smaller groups of people such as nursing staff in a critical care unit. A poster presenting research findings provides the opportunity for researchers to speak directly with the participants at conferences.⁵ It also gives the presenter the opportunity to share the findings of the research with a large group of people.³ A poster provides enough information about a research study and disseminates scientific knowledge in an easy to understand format.^{2,5}

Posters have many advantages.^{3,4,6,7} First, they encourage interaction between the poster presenter and participants at a conference or between staff members in a clinical setting. Second, posters at scientific conferences allow findings of research studies to be presented at an earlier stage. Preliminary findings may be best presented with a poster presentation. Third, those viewing the poster may provide immediate feedback about the research study or clinical topic. Fourth, posters are used to reach many people. Fifth, posters present the most vital information about the research findings or clinical topic in a quick, easy-to-understand format. Sixth, posters can be cost-effective and present information in a timely fashion. They can be inexpensive to prepare. However, posters can be more expensive depending on the format and materials used. In other words, posters can range in cost. Lastly, posters provide great networking opportunities.

Although posters have many advantages, there are some drawbacks. Posters are passive in nature, and the presenter may not always be available during viewing

times. Also, posters present material using a visual format. If the poster is not well constructed, it may be unappealing to potential viewers.⁷

Posters present material using a visual format.

■ GUIDELINES FOR POSTER PRESENTATIONS

If you are asked to present a poster at a conference or as part of a school project, precisely follow the guidelines developed by the conference planners or faculty.¹ Posters in the clinical setting have more flexibility in their presentation. There are certain guidelines that may assist you in the development of your poster. These include the following^{1-5,7}:

1. The poster must be appealing to the eye. A poster uses a visual format to convey information. Only critical information and key points should be included on the poster.
2. Allow enough time to create the poster. Posters presented at scientific meetings may take up to 8 weeks to create. Less formal presentations in the workplace or school take less time to create.
3. Design the poster first on paper.
4. Content presented on a research poster will vary from that on a clinical topic. Content for a research poster should include the purpose of the study, research design, research questions, findings, and implications. In the clinical setting, content may include a copy of the new policy or new information for the staff. Regardless, content for all posters must be presented in a clear, concise manner.
5. Use short sentences or a bullet format to present the most important information.
6. The poster should be read within 3 to 5 minutes.
7. Use letters that can be read from 2 to 4 ft. Letters in titles or headings may have a height of 2 to 3 in. Avoid elaborate type fonts. Posters are read from left to right, so organize content in this fashion.
8. Consider using color to emphasize certain information. Use dark lettering on a light background or vice versa. High contrast is appropriate. Remember that colors can stimulate (reds and yellows) or calm (blues and greens). Consider using bright colors with complimentary colors.
9. Determine if the poster will be placed on a table, easel, bulletin board or wall.
10. Include images, figures, graphs, and photographs when possible.

11. Remember, posters do not tell; they show.
12. Use appropriate headings for the content presented. Possible headings may include purpose, new policy, clinical significant findings, and results.
13. The poster should not be too wordy, overcrowded, or cluttered. Keep it simple.
14. Posters can be used using commercial graphics, software programs, and computer-generated printing.
15. Use quality materials when creating your poster.

Remember, posters do not tell; they show.

If you are traveling with your poster to a professional meeting, follow the instructions provided by the conference planning committee. Take measures to protect your poster during travel, such as using a plastic cover or a mailing tube. If the poster is created in panels, take precautions to properly pack the panels. Use a good carrying case or portfolio. Take extra tape, Velcro, pushpins, and markers. It is always better to be prepared for the worst while hoping for the best. If you are presenting at a conference, take business cards with you to distribute to conference participants.^{3,7}

■ CONCLUSION

Posters can be an effective means of disseminating information to large groups of people. They can be used in any setting: clinical, academia, or professional conference. A poster can present new clinical information, research findings, or information specific to one unit or facility. Early and ample planning can help create the best possible poster. A poster can be cost-effective and an easy way to disseminate information. Simply follow the guidelines when making your poster. Also, remember, if you are presenting your poster at a conference, follow the instructions provided by the conference planners.

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