

Creating an Effective Research Poster

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"It is not the fruits of scientific research that elevate man and enrich his nature. But the urge to understand, the intellectual work, creative or receptive." Albert Einstein

Why did you conduct your research study? The most obvious answer is that you had a clinical problem that required an answer. Now you have completed your study, you want to share your findings. One of the most effective mechanisms is through a poster presentation at a professional meeting, such as the ASPAN National Conference. Here research can be disseminated through the presentation of research posters.

Poster presentations are very different than a scholarly paper. An effective poster is a **visual** communication of research findings. Your poster needs to be visually appealing, informative and well-organized. **A poster is not a research paper.** The poster should **show**, not tell, about the research through graphs and images. You can provide additional details as needed during the poster presentation.

The first step in developing your research poster is to determine what the poster size requirements are. There are different requirements for posters. Templates are available to make posters, for example Microsoft PowerPoint has one. The poster should also be developed in an organized fashion, so that the sequence of your research is evident. Consider what information should be included. You should ask: Can I present this finding with a figure rather than text? Figures tend to save space and, more importantly, attract the attention of attendees. These goals require decisions about what to include, as well as what not to include. The American Psychological Association states that the title, introduction, methods, results and conclusions should be included.¹ Know what your main point is and highlight it. One common mistake is to include too much information on the method when the focus (unless there is a new method involved) is on the results.¹ Because of space issues, focus on the key findings of the research.

The text should be a sans serif font and large type for posters (48 point for title and at least 20 point for font).¹ The title and the authors, along with their affiliations, are on the top of the poster. Only those people who contributed intellectually to the project should be listed as authors. People who assisted with the project in other ways can be acknowledged at the end of the poster. If your study was funded, the funding agency will probably require a specific acknowledgement on all posters and papers. Do not overlook this.

The use of color is important and the use of primary colors (red, yellow, blue) creates good contrast. Stick to 2-3 colors for the poster. Black ink is the better choice for text; however, color is good with key words. Empty white space boosts the effect of colored parts of the poster.¹

On the day of your poster presentation, relax! Bring business cards and copies of your abstract to pass out to attendees. Anticipate questions and if you are unsure of an answer, take the attendee's number and follow-up. Many people appreciate a 'walk through' of your findings, which should take no more than 3-5 minutes. You may get helpful suggestions on improving your study. **This is part of the process**, so use it as a chance to grow as a researcher. Your findings add to the scientific knowledge base of nursing. Enjoy disseminating your findings.

References: 1. Nicol, A. & Pexman, P. (2003). *Displaying your findings: A practical guide for creating figures, posters, and presentations*. American Psychological Association: Washington DC.

Helpful references for developing and presenting research posters:

Coad J & Devitt P. Research dissemination: The art of writing an abstract for conferences. *Nurse Education in Practice*: 6(2), pp. 112-116, March 2006.

*This article is available @ <http://www.sciencedirect.com/>

Ellerbe SM. Posters with an artistic flair. *Nurse Educator*: 31(4), pp. 166-169, July/August 2006.

Foote MA. Some concrete ideas about manuscript abstracts. *Chest*: 129(5), pp. 1375-1377, May 2006.

Keely BR. Planning and creating effective scientific posters. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*: 35(4), pp. 182-185, July/August 2006