

How to create a poster for a conference

Conferences in the renal community are a key forum to share work and information to the wider multidisciplinary team. In the past few years, as conferences have grown in size, a poster presentation has become an ideal way for new and experienced presenters to show case their work. In this article, ANN UK executive board member Helen Watts explores the art of creating and giving impact to your poster presentation

■ poster ■ presentation ■ results ■ conference

So you have had your abstract accepted and excitement prevails, shortly followed by fear as to how you are going to make and present this poster. Will it be credible? Who will be interested? How do I make it? The simple answer is that you know your work best, and there is a great camaraderie at conference, particularly to newcomers and nurses. There is always much bustle and excitement in the poster area. You are likely to have a raft of experienced presenters and colleagues around you, and they will all want to help and support you. Keep focused that the final presentation will be a proud moment.

The first rule of any presentation is to start early. Remember both yourself and your colleagues who may help are busy. Allow time within your preparation to write, plan and review your poster. You will benefit from asking colleagues and lay friends to proofread your work. Give them a realistic time scale to achieve this for you. You may also wish to make changes following their feedback.

Printing, although achievable quickly in this electronic age, will be far less stressful if you allow time for mishaps, postal failure, and so on. You may be lucky to have an on-site printing service within your organisation; if not, look online or try local printers, who are often very helpful and will be happy to advise you on font and other details. Check with your chosen printing service that they can meet your deadline. In general, you get what you pay for with printing and going with the cheapest option isn't always the best idea. If you do not want your hard

work spoiled by a poor quality of print, consider paying a bit more.

Tools

Design your poster on your computer. Microsoft Publisher and Powerpoint are popular. It helps if you are practised in using these programs—if not, find someone who can help you. A kind colleague or friend may be able to help, or might even give you a previous poster template to adapt and practise with first. Check your font size to ensure that it will be appropriate once blown up. The printing team or conference guidelines can help you with this. Always keep a backup. Email your poster to yourself at every stage, so that you always have a recent copy.

Title

Choose a title with impact that clearly conveys the message that you want to share (Wells, 2017). As readers peruse the poster area, their eyes will be drawn to the title first. If your poster is on a specific topic (for example, dialysis, education, patient experience) then make sure that this is clear in the title, preferably coupled with an exciting outcome of your work.

Content

Read and follow conference guidelines carefully before you start. There will likely be restrictions on size and recommendations for orientation.

Check with the organisation you represent if any corporate logos are expected to be used. Your organisation

may have a set format for posters to adhere to. Always make sure that any co-authors get final viewing before print, out of courtesy.

When it comes to poster content, remember that less is more. The purpose of a poster is for an audience to be able to view a large number of studies/reports in a fairly short period of time. At most conferences, you will get a chance to present your poster, and reams of writing will detract from the content and dilute the message that you are trying to convey. People often photograph posters so that they can read them at a later time. A clear format will make for easier reading later. Use white space effectively: approximately 30–40% of your poster should be blank (Gundogan, 2016). This creates impact. If you use colour, be careful, as colours often look different on screen to in print. Print a draft in A4 to see the impact before finalising.

Section your poster so that it is organised and flows. A sensible format of headings is: aim, introduction, methods, results, conclusion, references and acknowledgements.

The aim should be a short summary of what you were trying to achieve in your work/study. Methods should outline

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any research methods (qualitative, quantitative), inclusion/exclusion criteria, statistical methods used.

Results matter. Remember that the reader may read the title and then results before deciding if they are interested enough to read the rest of your poster. Clarity of results is therefore important. If you have large amounts of results or data this is better displayed in table or graph format. Get advice if you are not sure what style would best suit your study results. There will be a statistics expert within your team or organisation who will be willing to give you advice.

Your conclusion should not draw on any new material, but summarise the outcomes from the results that you have presented. Conclusions should be based on your findings and not your opinion. It is often wise to following your conclusion to make recommendations for the future. Where has this work led you? What more needs to be done? Was it successful?

Finish with any references and/or acknowledgements. References are there to back up your points, and should be

included for any work that is not your own. The acknowledgements section is there for you to thank someone who may have assisted you or funded the work.

At most conferences, you will be required to verbally present your poster. The presentation will be chaired/led by an expert. You will be grouped with other posters of similar topics, and will be given a short time frame to present your work (usually 5–10 minutes), after which questions will follow. Your audience will be smaller than that of an oral presentation but more personal, so you may have more intense questions.

Fear not though, remember that you know your work. People are kind and they are not trying to catch you out—they only want you to do well. If you are lucky, ANN UK members might be in attendance to cheer you on.

Summary

Poster presentation is rewarding, great for your development and can be added to your CV. It is a good way of displaying research that may not make it to oral

presentation. It is possible to enter abstracts for poster only initially as a way of gaining confidence, before trying for an oral presentation. It is also a good medium to take back to your clinical area to display for your patients and colleagues. Three of my posters on patient information needs and education are displayed in my outpatient area. I believe that this helps to show that we care about our patients and their needs, and are trying to better understand them. Celebrate your achievement, be proud of your work and share it with the renal community. **JKC**

References

- Gundogan B, Koshy K, Kurar L, Whitehurst K. How to make an academic poster. *Ann Med Surg.* 2016; 11:69–71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amsu.2016.09.001>
- Wells M. The power of the poster. *The Researcher.* 3rd edn. 2017:pp14–15. 2017. <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/910167/14/> (Accessed 11 January 2019)

