Making the Most of Your Poster Presentation (2)

Takako Kojima\textsuperscript{1)} and J. Patrick Barron\textsuperscript{2)}

\textsuperscript{1)}Department of International Medical Communications, Tokyo Medical University
\textsuperscript{2)}Tokyo Medical University

Now that we have discussed how to design high-impact posters for international conferences\textsuperscript{1)}, we will present an alternative layout for posters, in addition to introducing some useful tips on how to prepare for your travel with a poster, and what you should do during your poster presentation to make it most effective.

\textbf{Another sample of a poster layout}

In our previous article, we introduced a very basic yet effective format when creating posters\textsuperscript{1)}. Figure 1 is an alternative format which can be used. The main differences are that instead of an Abstract, the Methods are listed on the left side, followed by significant points from the Discussion on both sides of the Results. The Results are placed in the main central portion of the poster as it is the most important element\textsuperscript{2)}, and includes graphs and figures.

\textbf{The pros and cons of poster presentations}

Due to the limited space and fixed size of the poster, poster presentations have a primary advantage of enabling constitutive information to be displayed in a short, and distinct way. This enables the audience to rapidly grasp information that is essential to the research. However, this so-called benefit can in fact become a potential risk, if it is overdone. Hamilton states that one of the most common mistakes in poster presentations is communicating with too much information\textsuperscript{2)}. For example, if an author attempts to display too much information, the poster will become overloaded with information. Furthermore, the language used may have to be abbreviated due to the lack of space, which will have the negative effect of making it very difficult for the audience to follow. From the point of view of the congress organizers, they can have more poster presentations per room per day than oral presentations, therefore...
they are able to accept a greater number of applicants, which will increase the registration income. Moreover, it is also possible for the organizers to accept poster presentations from individuals whose level of English is an unknown factor.

Preparing for travel

It is needless to say that you need to carry with you all data pertaining to your poster, in case something happens to your poster during your travel to the conference site. Over the years, the authors have been informed of a few situations whereby the author is overseas for a conference and accidentally forgets their poster on a bus or in a taxi. It is therefore wise to have a complete electronic set of poster data in case of an emergency. In the worst case scenario, you could print out all slides and use them as a substitute, therefore it would be handy to also have supplies such as tape or pins. Furthermore, it is an invitation for disaster to place your poster with your flight check-in baggage, as it could become lost and perhaps untraceable by the time of your presentation, so we strongly recommend that you carry it on the aircraft as hand baggage.

At the conference site

It is always advisable to arrive at the conference site well in advance so that you can allow yourself to set up the poster in the designated space in your own time, as well as settling down. The poster, of course, will need to be very clear and understandable by itself to the audience, even at a time when you are not obligated to be present. However, since poster sessions are less formal compared with regular plenary sessions, you should be prepared for more interactive communication with the audience, both in terms of quantity and depth of questions. To enhance such ‘discussions’, it would be wise to think beforehand of questions that might arise and how you might answer to them. Furthermore, it is also advisable to know how to initiate a discussion, in case there are no questions. For example, if you ask those around you to give their ideas or expert advice on a certain issue brought up in your presentation, this could be a good way to initiate communication and also to be introduced to who they are. It is also quite common to find posters with no one standing near them. This is because some authors tend to display their posters and then leave the conference site. As expected, this is not an ideal way to spend your precious conference time, as it is always beneficial to form networks with attendees at an international conference who are interested in your topic. Such persons may include future reviewers of papers you submit to journals for consideration for publication. The rule is, not to be shy, and stand near your poster for the entire session.

After the poster presentation

It is not uncommon for authors to decide to write a full original manuscript on the same topic as their poster presentation, and therefore may be concerned about duplicate publication. However, if the poster presentation only presents the main points of a research project and does not provide all detailed information, such as in an original paper, this would not be considered duplicate publication. The ICMJE Recommendations state that it “does not prevent a journal from considering a complete report that follows publication of a preliminary report, such as a letter to the editor or an abstract or poster displayed at a scientific meeting. It also does not prevent journals from considering a paper that has been presented at a scientific meeting but was not published in full, or that is being considered for publication in proceedings or similar format.”

However, as we mentioned in our previous article, if you have any hesitation about the possibility of duplication of a paper with a previous poster presentation, you should mention this in your cover letter and include a copy of your poster. It is then up to the Editor-in-Chief to make an informed decision about the appropriateness of your submission.

Cleaning up

Be sure to remember to take down your poster after your session. Leaving it displayed, making others take it down, will create a bad impression and is lacking in collegiality. You should leave the site of your poster clean and neat.
Closing message

This concludes the series of articles introducing the free Internet site\(^4\) providing information on medical writing and communications\(^5\). This joint authorship article series has been partially replicated and reported in www.ronbun.jp.\(^4\). Future topics in this Medical Writing sequence will include those on publication ethics, the editorial process, and other significant issues that will be of use to readers and future authors submitting papers to the Japanese Journal of Gastroenterological Surgery.

References

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