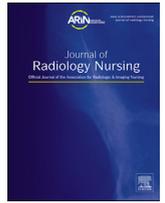




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The 5 Cs for Developing an Effective Poster Presentation



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A B S T R A C T

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Disseminating nursing knowledge is imperative for the forward mobilization of the nursing profession. Poster presentations are an invaluable communication tool for nurses to disseminate knowledge about research, quality, or process improvement work. Generally, nurses are excited when their abstracts are accepted for presentation. That excitement, however, quickly wears off as they start thinking “what next?” This article will outline the 5 Cs for developing an effective poster presentation and provide some useful tips for preparation and how to give an effective poster presentation.

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Introduction

Poster presentations are a visual or pictorial version of research, quality, or process improvement work. They are a vehicle for disseminating pertinent findings from that work (Papanas, Georgiadis, Demetriou, Lazarides, & Maltezos, 2019). Poster presentations are a hybrid of oral presentations and publications. They provide a summary of the author's work without the in-depth writing involved in a publication or the comprehensive verbal discussion in an oral presentation. Knowledge shared through poster presentations can spark new ideas for research and can help eliminate redundancies in solving practice-related problems (Williams & Cullen, 2016). Poster presentations can also help the professional development of the presenter (Sherman, 2010; Williams & Cullen, 2016). Presenters can develop or enhance their public speaking skills, showcase their talent, and shamelessly self-promote as an expert of the topic of work and network with journal editors, future collaborators, and even future employers. There is indisputable value in poster presentations, but there are several barriers and common pitfalls that prevent nurses from developing poster presentations. Some of the barriers and pitfalls include lack of experience developing posters, lack of confidence in public speaking, difficulties taking positive criticism, and being uncertain of the contribution to nursing (Hanrahan, Marlow, Aldrich, & Hiatt, 2010). To help break down some of these barriers and prevent common pitfalls, this article will outline the 5 Cs for developing an effective poster presentation and provide some useful tips for

preparation and how to give an effective poster presentation. The 5 Cs, that is, Compliant, Catchy, Concise, Clear & Clutter-free, were developed by the author based on common themes identified in literature on poster presentations (Berg & Hicks, 2017; Erren & Bourne, 2007; Foote, 2010; Papanas et al., 2019; Sherman, 2010; Williams & Cullen, 2016).

The 5 Cs for developing an effective poster presentation

The following 5 Cs are useful guides when developing an effective poster presentation. Keeping these in mind will facilitate the process and prevent unnecessary loss of time when constructing your poster.

Compliant

It is your responsibility as a presenter to read and be complaint with conference poster guidelines (Erren & Bourne, 2007; Foote, 2010; Sherman, 2010). Once your abstract is accepted for presentation at a conference such as the annual Association for Radiologic and Imaging Nursing meeting, you will receive a letter of congratulations that includes instructional guidelines. These guidelines specify poster size (dimensions), display formats (digital or paper), judging criteria, if applicable, and setup, tear-down, and presentation times (Foote, 2010; Sherman, 2010). Poster presentations have evolved over the last few years; some professional organizations now require digital or e-posters rather than the traditional printed form (Berg & Hicks, 2017; Matthews, 2014; Papanas et al., 2019). Know how the poster will be presented, for example, on a digital screen, on an easel, or on fabric on a rolling stand or taped to a wall (with painter's tape). Regardless of the format, as the presenter, you must comply with the poster guidelines to ensure all criteria are met.

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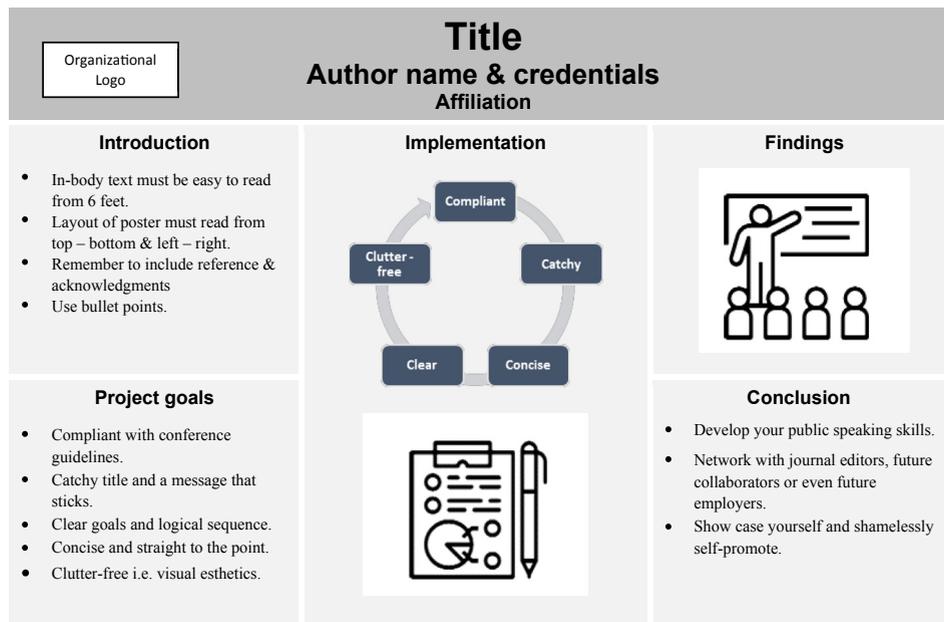


Figure 1. A basic poster template designed applying the 5 Cs.

Catchy

The title of your poster must be catchy! It must be creatively developed such that the subject and purpose of your poster are easily deduced (Erren & Bourne, 2007; Papanas et al., 2019). The title can be a question or a descriptor of the scope of work or key findings from the work (Erren & Bourne, 2007). The title should be short and sharp like a hook, which should draw in the attendees to want to learn more about your work. Consider your audience when planning the poster. Are they clinical versus nonclinical or are they students versus faculty? This will guide you on the scope and depth of your presentation (Erren & Bourne, 2007). Your poster must be eye catching and visually appealing in color, texture, and context. Be your own judge. If you were an attendee, would you be inspired to look closer at your poster? (Foote, 2010). Once you have captured attendees in front of your poster, entice them with a short, focused, and clearly stated narrative of your poster (Erren & Bourne, 2007). Thereafter, allow them to read the poster and ask you questions as needed.

Clear

Your poster presentation should “stand alone.” Attendees must be able to read and understand your viewpoint without you being present to explain (Sherman, 2010). As the presenter, you serve as a compliment to your poster answering any questions regarding your work. There must be a clear logical sequence in the manner in which the content is written and presented (Williams & Cullen, 2016). People from Western cultures generally read from top to bottom and left to right; as such, the content layout must be progressive and not repetitive (Williams & Cullen, 2016).

Visual clarity is of the essence. The title must be legible from 15 to 20 feet and in-body text from 4 to 6 feet (Berg & Hicks, 2017; Foote, 2010; Sherman, 2010). Pictures and graphics should not be jagged, blurry, or pixilated. It is best to create your own graphs, use original photographs, or import digital files such as clip arts. Be careful with color choice (Foote, 2010; Papanas et al., 2019; Sherman, 2010). Too many colors may clash and become overwhelming to the eyes. Text must stand out clearly from the

background. Red text over blue background appears blurry and yellow text over white background is difficult to read. It is best to have darker text over lighter background and with complementary colors such green, gray, or blue in other sections of the poster (Sherman, 2010).

Concise

There are space limitations when it comes to poster presentations; therefore, brevity is key. You must convey the key points of your work clearly and succinctly (Erren & Bourne, 2007; Sherman, 2010). Bullet points are ideal. Attendees only have a few minutes to spend looking at your poster. A wordy, busy looking poster may discourage them from reading your poster (Erren & Bourne, 2007; Foote, 2010; Sherman, 2010). Use pictures and graphics that are simple, self-contained, and easy to comprehend. The maxim “a picture is worth a thousand words” holds true when it comes to poster presentations. Pictures or graphics can concisely demonstrate a concept or results, so don't be afraid to include them on your poster (Foote, 2010; Sherman, 2010; Williams & Cullen, 2016).

Clutter-Free

Carefully consider the amount of text, font size, and font type when developing your poster (Erren & Bourne, 2007; Foote, 2010; Sherman, 2010). White space is your friend! Avoid sentence overload because too much text makes your poster appear cluttered, busy, and overwhelming to look at (Berg & Hicks, 2017). Use bold fonts and italics sparingly otherwise they can become distracting (Sherman, 2010). Choose fonts that are easy to read—a nonserif such as Tahoma for your titles and subtitles and serif fonts such as Times New Roman for body text (Sherman, 2010). Do not mix fonts within body text as this has a messy and cluttered appearance (Sherman, 2010). See Figure 1 for a poster template which applies the 5 Cs.

Table 1
The Do's and Don'ts for giving an effective poster presentation

Giving a poster presentation	
Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do remember the weatherman stance—Stand beside your poster so attendees can see the poster while you talk and point toward your poster. • Do give attendees a chance to read the poster—give a short, focused introduction and then let the attendees read the poster so they ask questions. • Do read body language—check for interest, do they look like they have questions. • Do listen carefully to questions—you are the expert listen carefully and respond thoughtfully. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't badger attendees—watch for interest, if they are interested, they will stay and they ask questions. • Don't read the poster—the attendees can read; remember your 3- to 5-minute rehearsed presentation. • Don't chew gum and don't use your cellphone—this is unprofessional! • Don't start from beginning of your presentation if more attendees come while in middle of talking—Respect those present and tell the new attendees where you are in the presentation and move on. You lose attendee engagement if you start over.

Prepare, practice, and present

The time between when you receive a letter of acceptance for the poster until the conference date will vary. Depending on your experience developing a poster, it is recommended to begin working on your poster at that time of receipt of this letter (Berg & Hicks, 2017; Erren & Bourne, 2007; Sherman, 2010). Sketch out your ideas and design your poster applying the 5 Cs. You will determine the subsections of your poster based on the poster guidelines or initial call for abstracts. About 2 to 4 weeks before the event as you refine your poster to a final draft, prepare a 3- to 5-minute oral presentation of your poster (Erren & Bourne, 2007; Foote, 2010; Sherman, 2010). "Practice makes perfect," therefore, practice! practice! Anticipate questions that you will be asked during the poster session and develop pre-thought-out responses (Berg & Hicks, 2017; Foote, 2010). See Table 1 for The Do's and Don'ts for giving an effective poster presentation.

Remember to solicit feedback and critique from a peer (Foote, 2010; Sherman, 2010). Ask them to proofread your poster for grammar, spelling, and typographical errors (Foote, 2010; Sherman, 2010). Do this before sending the poster out for printing. Reordering a poster with corrections can be a costly mistake. For posters in digital form, be sure that the poster is saved in the required format PDF versus PowerPoint, single slide versus multiple slides (Berg & Hicks, 2017; Papanas et al., 2019). Know how, when, and where to upload the poster. If you developed a traditional poster, ensure it is sized appropriately and send it for printing ahead of time. Your organizations marketing or professional development department may have templates for posters and printing services, so inquire on that (Berg & Hicks, 2017; Foote, 2010). If not, you can always get poster templates free online and print at a local printing company. Make handout copies of your poster to give to attendees when they visit your poster (Berg & Hicks, 2017). All of your printed material must be ready in hand at least 5 days before your conference. It is important to decide if you will hand carry the poster with you. Some companies will print to a foldable paper (wrinkle-resistant polyester fabric) but most will put the product in a sturdy cardboard tube. Cost may help you determine your preference.

Remember to bring professional business cards; this is important so attendees have your contact information if they have further questions or want to propose future collaborations (Berg & Hicks, 2017; Sherman, 2010). The presenter's appearance should be professional; business casual is acceptable for most meetings. Finally, know the setup, tear down, and actual poster session times and be there on time.

Conclusion

Although there are several barriers and pitfalls to developing a poster presentation, applying the 5 Cs and following the outlined preparation strategies should help you to develop and give an effective poster presentation. So, remember to prepare, practice, show up, smile, and present with enthusiasm. Good luck!

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