

How to Develop a Poster

A Professional's Guide to Creating and Presenting Conference Posters

BY

Virginia McNaughton,
Dawn Christensen
AND Kimberly LeBlanc

The sharing of ideas and experiences is paramount to maintaining evidence-based practice. Publication is one way of disseminating evidence into practice. Publication, however, can be a scary and daunting prospect to the novice. Poster presentations are a valuable adjunct to scientific conferences. They are an opportunity for researchers, clinicians, educators and policy-makers to share with the attendees their latest passion, burning questions, innovative practices or new paradigms for delivering care. They provide an opportunity to venture into publication and can often be a stepping-stone to journal publication.

The purpose of this article is to provide a step-by-step guide to poster development and exhibition at conferences.

Getting Started

If possible, familiarize yourself with posters that have been presented and developed by others. All conferences provide a poster hall for viewing. Most conferences divide the poster hall into sections. For example, at the Canadian Association of Wound Care (CAWC) annual conference, posters are grouped under the following themes: Clinical or Laboratory Research, Clinical Case Studies, Clinical/Instructional/Educational Reports or Health-care Policy and Delivery.

Most conferences schedule a time during which the poster authors are present and attendees may view the poster and talk to the author about their experiences.

This is an exciting time for everyone, as often authors are making their professional debut and their enthusiasm for their project is contagious!

Decide which conference to submit an abstract to. Read the conference goals and objectives carefully to ensure that the conference is a positive venue to display your work. Carefully read the guidelines for abstract submissions for posters and follow the directions for submission.


Developing a Poster Topic

The first step is to identify a category into which you would like to submit your poster. Then research the literature for evidence to support your work.¹

Poster Savvy

Posters are composed of a short title, an introduction to your hypothesis, a question or case study, an overview of what has already been done, your results and a section discussing the clinical relevance of what you have discovered. This can include innovative practice, research, teaching materials or the display of new technologies.

Posters should be visually appealing, easy to read from a distance of two to three feet and take no longer than 10 minutes to read. Imagine yourself standing in front of your poster. Ten minutes is a long time, and if your poster is hard to read or confusing you won't stick it out, nor will your reader. Your poster should have interesting photos, capture the reader's attention effectively and be easy to read.



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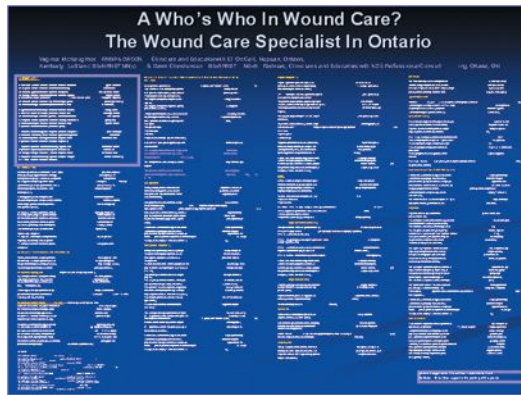
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FIGURE 1



This is an example of a poster that is too wordy and is difficult to read in a conference venue. Without photos and charts, it does not effectively capture the reader's attention. An article would be a better format for the information in this poster.

Most posters are divided into sections. The usual sections included on a poster are listed as follows.

Title: Think of your title as a “grabber.” Not only should it supply the reader with a quick idea of the information contained in the materials, but it should also catch their attention.

Abstract: Conference organizers will read the abstract to determine if they will accept your poster to be displayed at their conference. Abstracts are usually published in the conference syllabus. Abstracts for posters are similar to those written for journal articles. They should be concise and provide a clear overview of your poster. A good abstract will draw attention to your poster and encourage conference attendees to seek it out.² Once again, check the conference guidelines for abstracts. There will usually be a word limit. Two hundred words is the average length for an abstract.

Wound Care Canada (WCC) has published several articles on abstract development for oral or poster presentations.^{2,3}

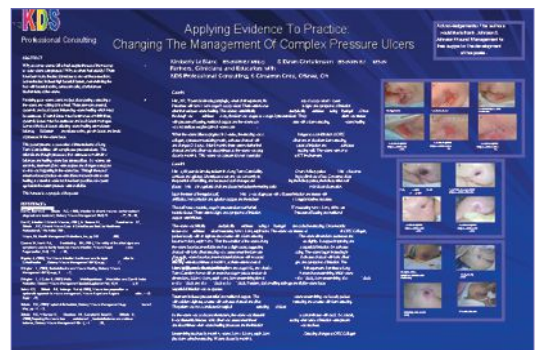
Introduction: The introduction is the key to capturing the reader's interest. It should be short, clear and concise. The introduction is a means to relate your issue to the published literature and should show validation as to why your work is unique and important.

Materials and Methods: Describe your methods; be concise. Use pictures, tables and flow charts to capture important information easily. Include a description of any statistical methods and analyses used.

Results: Describe what your experiment, new clinical initiative, educational program, case study, case series or policy achieved. Use pictures, tables and graphs to demonstrate and strengthen your position. This is the most important section of your poster. Make sure that it engages the reader (i.e., that it is big enough to read, visually appealing and contains valuable information). Remember, people are looking for ways to improve what they do.

Conclusions: Your conclusion should be concise. It should remind the reader of your hypothesis, question or clinical issue and discuss the relevance of your work to the real world. At wound-care conferences we often see posters that look very scientific but may have little relevance to clinical practice.

FIGURE 2



This poster is well balanced with enough detail in the written areas to give the reader a thorough understanding of what the problem was and what was done to solve it. It has many interesting photos, captures the reader's attention effectively, is easy to read, and acknowledges the financial support received.

References: Be sure to include all referenced literature and sources. This is a very important part of your poster. Check with the conference abstract submission guidelines for specific details for referencing materials. If no guidelines are provided, the American Psychological Association (APA) Manual provides clear instruction on reference format.⁴

Acknowledgements: Usually the conference committee will ask you to acknowledge if you have received money or support from anyone for your poster. Once again, check the guidelines for submissions to ensure you have completed this section correctly. This is your opportunity to recognize any support you have received from industry or other funding sources. You must acknowledge them specifically (i.e., provide “full disclosure”).

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Further information: After reading your poster, people will want to know more. Provide your e-mail address and or contact information so people can contact you to obtain further information. Once you have completed your poster, critique it using the CRAP tool to see if you have included all the vital elements.^{2,3}

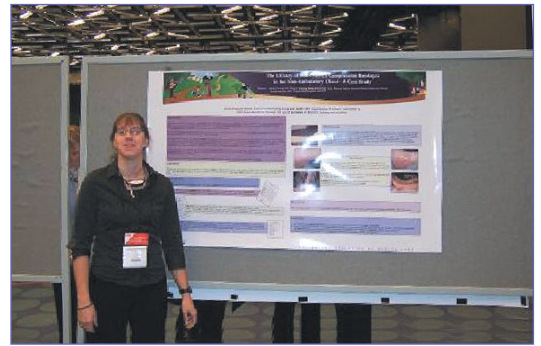
Actual Poster Construction

Before you begin, check the conference guidelines for abstracts to determine if there are size limitations. Speak with your printer; often there are significantly lower rates if the poster is 36 inches or less in at least one dimension.

If you find Microsoft® (MS) PowerPoint® intimidating, you may start your poster by laying it out in sections using pieces of paper. This is called "storyboarding." Posters are quick snapshots of your work. Determine what three key points you want to make.

- Use several pieces of 8.5" x 11" paper to mock up the poster.
- Add the headings and roughly sketch the text layout and graphics.
- Tape or pin the sheets to a wall and rearrange them until you like the arrangement.

FIGURE 3



This poster appears well balanced and easy to read. One of the authors is standing by ready to enthusiastically engage interested conference participants. She is conservatively dressed and is wearing her name tag so that the public know right away that she is the one of the authors.

Make sure that your poster is easy to read. It should flow from top left to bottom right. Use arrows, pointing hands, numbers, or letters to help clarify the sequence or flow of the poster.

If you have the bonus of access to a graphic designer, show them your storyboard, and they will help design and print your poster. If you do not have this option, a poster can be easily created by an "amateur" using MS PowerPoint.

Using MS PowerPoint®

There are many good references on the Web to help you with the actual construction of your poster using MS PowerPoint. Following is a quick guide to using PowerPoint® to create a poster.

1. Prepare the words for the poster in a MS Word® document. Save it.
2. Open MS PowerPoint.
3. Keep both MS Word and MS PowerPoint open.
4. In MS PowerPoint from the dialog box, select the blank slide. Then click **OK**.
5. Click **File / Page set up**.
6. Under **Slides Sized For**, click **Custom**.
7. Size your poster to the size you want. For example, 50 inches wide and 36 inches high is a size that is big enough to provide adequate space to display your photos, graphs and words, but small enough that it will be relatively inexpensive to have printed and laminated.
8. Click on the down arrow with the percentages and click on **Fit**. This will size the poster to fit on you computer screen. If you want to see how big the font or photos will actually be, click on **100%**.
9. To give your document a background image, go to **View / Master / Slide Master / Insert / Picture / From File**. Once you've selected the picture you would like to use as your background, double click on the picture, and then right click **Format Picture**. Then click on **Color**, choose **Washout** and click **OK**. Close out of **Master View**.
10. Click on the text box. Insert the title of your presentation across the top of the slide. Add the author's names and affiliations. Your title should be quite large; 100 points is a good start. (The person who did the most work on the poster or project is listed first.)
11. **Copy** your abstract from your MS Word document.
12. In MS PowerPoint, click on **Text Box** in the bottom ruler. Draw a text box in the area of the slide where you want the abstract to be. Click in the text box and **Paste** in the abstract. Change to font to 34 points.
13. Use the **Text Box** in combination with the **Line Style** to create boxes.
14. To add an image, go to the **Insert** menu. **Insert Picture / From File** and find the file, then click **OK**.
15. Or, you can use **Copy** and **Paste**. Select the graphic in the original document (you will see handles on the graphic), then go to **Edit / Copy**, click on the slide, then **Edit / Paste**.
16. Click on the image, hold the left mouse button down and drag the image where you want it to go. Then click on the image again, this time on one of the corners and either push in (to reduce the size of the image) or pull out, remembering to keep the left

If you are comfortable creating your draft on the computer, you may start your poster in MS PowerPoint and completely bypass the storyboarding stage.

Presenting Your Poster

How your audience perceives you when you are presenting your poster is very important to how they will perceive your poster as a whole.

- Don't be late!
- Research suggests that people are more likely to avoid your poster if you clash with it. So choose stylish but not flamboyant clothing. Dress in a professional manner.⁵
- Make eye contact and smile at the people going by.
- Engage your audience by speaking to them. Start by introducing yourself.
- Wear a name tag that is visible.
- Don't eat or chew gum during the poster session.
- Bring business cards and hand them out. Leave them available in an envelope for when you are not there.
- Have reduced handouts of your poster. If the conference has scheduled more than one poster session, make sure you have handouts for each session.
- Thank people who stop by to look at your poster. If they stay for a few minutes to chat you have succeeded

in engaging them. If they leave saying, "Hmmm, very interesting," you have not engaged them.

Conclusion

Poster presentations are a fun and exciting way to enter into the world of publication and presentation of ideas. Develop an idea or concept, discuss it with colleagues and put your ideas on paper. Then, find a conference that fits with your personal mission, goals and values. Follow the steps previously outlined, and you'll soon be presenting your ideas to your peers. ☺

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Virginia McNaughton, BA, MPA (Health), RN, ET, is the Eastern WOCN consultant for Saint Elizabeth Health Care as well as the Regional Director (Ontario) for the CAET, a peer reviewer for *Ostomy/Wound Management* and *Advances in Skin and Wound Care*, a member of the CAWC Research Committee and an Academic Advisor with the CAET-ETNEP program.

Dawn Christensen, BScN, RN, ET, MHScN, IIWCC, is a Clinical Nurse Specialist and Nurse Educator with KDS Professional Consulting in Ottawa. Her background is community nursing, and currently her practice focuses on providing consultation, guidance and education to nurses in long-term care regarding ostomy and wound care. She has been an Enterostomal Therapy Nurse since 1989.

Kimberly Leblanc, BScN, ET, IIWCC, is a Clinical Nurse Specialist and Nurse Educator working with KDS Professional Consulting. She is currently enrolled in a Master's of Nursing program at Athabasca University. She has extensive acute-, long-term- and community-care experience in the areas of ostomy, wound and continence care. She has lectured extensively throughout Canada and has had articles published in several care-related publications.

- mouse button depressed.
17. Add in more text boxes and cut and paste from MS Word into the text boxes.
 18. To add some colour click on the **Font Color** icon. Select the down arrow, then **More Font Colors**. Select the colour you like, remembering that you want the title to be seen from a distance. Remember that some colour combinations will not work together; e.g., dark colour on dark colour. Do not use red with green as those who are colour blind will not be able to read it. Be sure there is good contrast between the background and the print font.
 19. Backgrounds can be inserted by using the **Format / Background** command. Minimize use of dark backgrounds as they use up a lot of ink and may overwhelm the viewer. Lines, boxes and arrows can be inserted using the **Drawing Toolbar**. If you don't see this **Toolbar**, use **View / Toolbars / Drawing** to make it available.
 20. To insert a table or graph from MS Excel®, create the table or graph and highlight or select it in MS Excel. You can then click on **Insert / Chart or Insert / Object**. **Insert / Object** enables you to add a finished chart and be able to link to it so that you can continue to

update MS Excel and then when you open MS PowerPoint to update your MS Excel file, you'll see that it is already updated.

21. If you have been sponsored in any way, be sure to insert a text box to acknowledge the sponsoring company or person.
22. If you want to see what the poster will look like in its final full-scale format, set your laptop up with an LCD projector to view it on a wall. Adjust the poster size by adjusting the distance between the projector and the wall until you've reached the dimensions you'd like to print your poster.¹

* Command names may vary between different versions of PowerPoint. If you need help locating a specific command, please check your software manual.