



And in Conclusion: Tips for Presenting Posters and Papers

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PRESENTING PAPERS AND/OR POSTERS at regional and national conventions has become a "rite of passage" in our discipline. Convention presentations have become a virtual requirement for anyone who wants to attend graduate school. Unfortunately, these presentations can be quite anxiety arousing, especially for students at their first couple of conventions. Contrary to popular belief, no student has ever fallen through the floor, had a heart attack, or been knocked unconscious by a microphone. However, there have been several cases of panic disorder, dissociative fugue, baroque fugue, and other stress-related reactions. Perhaps the most serious documented case of a negative outcome is the nervous student from Lawrence, Kansas, who was so anxious he misread a *p* value, and 25 people left the conference thinking that grocery clerks in 1978 had significantly different attitudes toward sausage casings than did grocery clerks in 1925.

To help prevent such tragic outcomes, we interviewed a large sample (three) of experienced convention presenters (one paper each) to find out what advice they would give to new presenters. We have incorporated their ideas, but kept their identities secret to protect their reputations.

The Proper Tack for Presenting Posters

The poster route is the easiest way to break into the convention business. Based on our observations, the number of posters at conventions has increased by 436% in the last 5 years. At one convention, we counted (OK, only one of us counted) a total of 658 posters. Here are some tips to help you join in the fun.

Posters are most often a collection of 8½" × 11" paper sheets tacked onto an easel, each sheet backed by a larger sheet of paper as a background. When presenting a poster, remember to put up more information than anybody could ever read in the two hours allotted to look at ALL the posters. The more information there, the less likely it is to find any errors.

You want people to come up to the poster and ask you questions. Therefore, be sure to use tiny print. This will force people to come right up and invade your personal space. The

only exceptions to the tiny-print rule are (a) the name of the study, which should be in letters one inch tall; (b) your name, which should be two inches tall; (c) your faculty advisor's name, three inches tall; and (d) the name of your school—you guessed it: 4 inches.

If you really want to create that cutting-edge feel, you should hand-letter your entire poster. This will make it look like you just finished analyzing the data last night. To drive home the point, write in your *F* values as people are reading your poster.

Don't worry about using graphics; their effectiveness is exaggerated. People who use lots of graphics are showing off, wasting money, or both.

If you must use charts or graphs, remember to design them so that small differences look large in order to confirm your hypotheses. And don't bother labeling the axes; people are too busy trying to read your 1,398-word abstract and really don't need to be bothered with such details.

If anybody asks WHY you used a particular manipulation, statistical test, or questionnaire, the proper response is, "My advisor told me to." (If your advisor asks, you're on your own. . . .)

The biggest decision you need to make in presenting a poster is . . . what backgrounds to use behind each part of the poster. The second addendum to the fourth edition of the *APA Publication Manual* has a detailed table that outlines what types of backgrounds to use. The correct background depends on several factors, the primary one being type of school. Students from Ivy League schools and larger private schools are permitted to use laminated sheets of paper with no background at all. (Of course, the name of their school is 10 inches tall.) Students from small private schools may use marbled stationery. Students from state schools may use construction paper. Ordinarily, those from Big Ten schools and schools with APA-approved clinical programs may use multiple colors; others use one color for all parts of the poster. Space is limited, so we cannot detail the many exceptions to these basic rules. But you may call our hot line at 1-800-BACKING.