

## **ACPIN Conference 2017**

### **Writing an abstract and preparing a poster for conference**

A poster presentation allows you to present an overview of your work to a wide audience, in a fairly relaxed and informal setting. It enables you as the presenter to interact with colleagues and interested parties, to network, share ideas and possibly even forge future collaborations. If you are relatively new to research a poster presentation provides an ideal catalyst to gather people's opinions of your work and you may even chose to use people's suggestions as feed-forward to refine your future research activity.

A poster presentation may provide an ideal opportunity as a stepping stone to get involved with research if you are short of time, have little paid time to get involved or have never been involved with research before. To print out a typically sized A0 poster, there are many cost-effectively online printing services but university and National Institute of Health Research funded Research Design Services linked to local NHS trusts may also have funding available for printing purposes. It is worth remembering that the National Institute of Health Research's objectives include trying to engage clinicians with research and so local Research Design Services may also be available to you to help with abstract and poster design. ACPIN are also very mindful to fund poster production costs in order to disseminate research findings within their research bursary funding.

#### **Step one – Planning your presentation**

The first step to preparing a poster for conference is to know exactly what message you want to convey in your poster. You may want to report a case study, a local audit, describe a new service or report the evaluation of the new service. You may have some research findings to report or even a research protocol of an intended future project.

#### **Step two – Writing the abstract**

In order to present at conference, the organisers will want to be able to judge the merit of your presentation over that of other applicants. In order to do so they will require an abstract. An abstract is in essence a short summary of your work. Typically there will be instructions concerning the abstract structure, i.e. whether you should use sub-headings, font type, font size, word count etc. The most important quality of the abstract is that it is clear and concise. You will want to include the most important details concerning your work but it is often best to avoid including fine details in the abstract. As with all academic styles of writing, statements requiring references within the abstract must be referenced but it is advisable to limit the need for references in the abstract, i.e. include the essential referable statements only.

### An example of abstract criteria:

- abstract written clearly and concisely
- title clearly describes the abstract
- a clear purpose is stated
- relevance to the conference theme
- context within current evidence base presented
- method/approach applied appropriate to aims
- evaluation/analysis and results appropriately applied and interpreted
- strengths and weaknesses of work highlighted
- relevance and implications to physical therapy clearly expressed
- suggestions for further work made
- of interest to an internationally diverse audience

### **An example of a typical abstract structure:**

**Title:** This should be clear and concise, eye-catching and punchy.

**Background:** This section needs to use only the key background literature to provide context for the subsequent work reported.

**Aims/purpose:** This needs to clearly give the reader an impression of the aim/purpose of the research and what they should expect to learn from reading the poster.

**Methods:** Key information regarding the methods used/proposed to be used should be highlighted here. Typically this would include some mention of the participants involved (the sample), equipment and procedures and timescales over which the study took place.

**Results:** The key results are often presented in this section. Statistical support is preferred where possible but endless lists of mean values and associated p-values should be avoided. Be selective and make sense that the results selected for presentation fit well with the general story conveyed within the abstract as a whole.

**Conclusion:** This section is used to wrap up the story, to convey the most important interpretation of the results and to make any important suggestions for relevance to the field or further work that now needs to be carried out. Avoid finishing with 'further research is now required' as often this is obvious and superfluous to the overall story.

Word count = Typically 250 -300 words

### **Step three – Designing your poster**

This is the fun part although there are typically some rules that you may have to abide by before you start. You need to first check on the required size of the poster and the orientation, i.e. whether you can design it in portrait or landscape. If unsure, portrait is often the safest guess as an A0 size poster is more likely to fit on the typically sized poster boards available at conference.

An example of how to change page sizes in powerpoint (see figure 1):

Go to the 'Design' tab. Select Page

Choose 'Custom' in the slides sized for list of options.

**AO = 1189mm (118.9cm) x 841mm (84.1cm)** so manually enter these figures into the open boxes provided.

You need to choose which software is best to design your poster in. Commonly used options include Microsoft Office Powerpoint, CorelDraw and Adobe Illustrator. In each the best thing to start of doing is set up the page size. If someone is standing one metre away from the board at conference to read your poster then the smallest font size that they will be easily able to read is about 20 point, but this assumes that you have sized your page correctly otherwise at the printing stage it could be scaled smaller or larger than intended.

In terms of readability, dark writing on light backgrounds or vice versa works best. Limited use of different type of font and size of font also works well. It's a fine balance between using these parameters to provide structure to the presentation and overly complicating the structure making it difficult to navigate.

If you can use diagrams rather than words to describe methods, results and key principles then please do; it's quicker for people to process and more visually interesting. Less text may be more effective in conveying a positive impression of your work than more. People typically spend between 30 seconds and a few minutes reading each poster so the easier the information is to digest, the better.

To present your information on the poster you may want to use features in the software such as 'snap to grid', 'guides' or even draw in some temporary grid lines, which you delete later, to make sure that your work looks neat and aligned. Small differences in alignment on a computer monitor can often be accentuated on a full sized poster print out so attention to detail is important.

It's always difficult to proof read a poster when limited to a small monitor size so consider asking a friend/colleague to have a second look for typos.

Remember that all authors of the work should be included in the upper title section of the poster and their institutional affiliations. The most senior author or the principal investigator of the work typically sits at the last author and the presenter and person designing the poster typically comes first. The order of the middle authors needs to

be agreed within the team. Any additional acknowledgements to people and organisations who are not authors are added at the bottom of the poster.

#### **Step four: Printing and preparing for the poster presentation**

The final step is to print out your poster. This step should be considered almost as soon as you think about designing the poster as it is important to be aware of printing timescales. Your chosen printer could offer a same day service or could take in excess of a week to turn around if busy or if the poster needs to be sent off site for purposes such as lamination. The weight of the paper will determine how expensive the print is but also how robust the poster is to travel (the thicker, the more robust). Lamination serves as an additional protective layer to the poster, typically increasing the lifespan of your poster, making it more resistant to rain but also making it heavier to transport and more expensive.

You may want to consider printing out a smaller mock-up version (A4 or A3) in order to check for last minute alignment, design issues and typos before you invest in the final version.

Once you have your poster it is now a good time to prepare to talk through the posters with others. Prepare a short verbal presentation that you can repeat on the day, no more than a few minutes long and this will give you confidence when at conference. When you are there, relax and enjoy the experience. If you want to remember who you spoke to and discussed your work with, take a note-pad and write down names and contact details if they are of interest to you. If you are very keen to network or disseminate your results to the conference audience you may also want to prepare A4 handouts of your poster or business cards ready to hand out.

#### **Overall**

Simple stories often make the most effective posters so don't worry if you don't have vast amounts of data for poster presentation purposes.

Poster presentations are brilliant ways of starting to talk about your work and in doing so don't be surprised if you find that you have a better understanding of it by the end of the conference!

Enjoy the experience and remember... There's often a poster prize to be won!

Research bursary application packs and guidance and application templates to present (platform or poster presentations) at the National ACPIN Conference are available from: [acpinconference@acpin.net](mailto:acpinconference@acpin.net)

### **Useful references:**

Coad, J. and Devitt, P. (2006) Research dissemination: The art of writing an abstract for conferences. *Nurse Education in Practice*. 6, p.112-116.

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Figure 1: An example poster created in powerpoint with a screen snapshot of how to size the page.

