

# Tips for presenting your poster or talk:

There is no better venue for students to present their work than the annual CSEE meeting, as our society strongly values the contributions of our student members. Here is some advice to guide you in your quest to create a great talk or poster (and maybe nab one of the presentation prizes!).

## *Tips for creating a great poster:*

Your poster is a visual aid and not a full paper rearranged into poster format. By creating a clear, concise and visually appealing poster you will attract people to your poster, effectively convey information, and increase the likelihood of getting great feedback. Here are some tips to accomplish this:

- 1) **Making your poster the correct size.** Be certain to check the size restriction for the poster on the meeting website and see if they will provide Velcro and/or pins to affix the poster to the board.
- 2) **Choose your key message.** You will not be able to include everything from your paper/thesis on your poster, so choose your key questions you want to focus upon and only include relevant data.
- 3) **General layout & content:**
  - Make sure your graphics are clear (e.g. no blurry pictures). The best way to test this is to use a projector to view your poster at full size prior to printing.
  - Put lots of space between sections; do not cram in as much information as you can. As a rule-of-thumb, your poster should be 50% empty space for maximum visual appeal.
  - Lay out your poster with a clear visual flow that guides the reader from point A to point B. One way to do this is arrange your poster from left to right and top to bottom. You can also number sections or use arrows to guide the reader.
  - You can organize your poster as you do a paper (with an Introduction, Methods, Results and Conclusions section), but you can also vary this format. For example, combined methods-results or results-discussion sections can save space and keep the reader engaged. See Smith et al. 2007 (in the reference list) for a good discussion of what to include in each of these sections.
  - A “visual hook”, such as a nice picture of your study species or a map of your study site, will attract readers.
  - Colour is your friend! If you have trouble deciding on what colours to use, use an online colour-scheme tool (e.g. Adobe Kuler). If you study something that is best shown with a video or sound recording (e.g. animal behavior, bird song), bring along your computer and to present this information as you go through your poster.
- 4) **Text:**
  - Minimize the amount of text you use. Aim for < 800 words.
  - Aim for a minimum text size of 32 point font for main text, 20 point for references. Your important text (figure legends, titles) should be easy to read from > 2 m away. Poster sessions can be packed and you may need to present your poster to a few people at a time.
  - Choose a sans-serif font for titles and a serif font for text.
  - Choose colors that make your text easy to read. Dark text on light background always works!
  - If you can use images instead of text to describe something – DO IT! This is especially helpful for the materials and methods.
  - Stay away from abbreviations if possible and define them if you do use them.
- **Figures:**
  - If you are presenting data, make your graphs the main focus of your poster.
  - Give your graphs informative titles (e.g. “Figure 1. Nitrogen concentration is positively correlated with seedling growth”).
  - Clearly list your variables and units of measurement on your X and Y axes.
  - If you are presenting a ‘proposed research’ poster then consider adding a series of graphs of ‘predicted/possible results’.
  - Avoid tables, but if you must include them, keep them simple.

Other:

- Have someone proofread your poster prior to printing.
- Some people will want the 'full tour' of your poster, and others will want a '2-minute overview'. Be prepared to present your poster to both audiences. Feel free to ask the person you are presenting to if they would prefer a full presentation or the short version when they arrive. Readers often have many posters they want to visit so are pressed for time.
- It is a good idea to have a few handouts (poster printed on 8.5x 11 paper) for those that would like one. This is especially helpful for judges.
- A good way to prepare to talk to judges is to think of the ten questions you'd ask yourself and talk with a friend about how you might answer them.
- Be friendly and professional. Poster sessions are more relaxed than talks, but are still a formal scientific discussion.
- Posters often provide great audience feedback! Thus, be sure to have a notepad handy to record comments and suggestions.
- Humor is okay, but remembers that many jokes are 'lost in translation' when presenting to international audiences so make sure the main points are clear.
- Don't forget to include contact information (your email and university affiliation).
- You can include quick response barcodes at the bottom of your poster to link to your contact information and lab website.

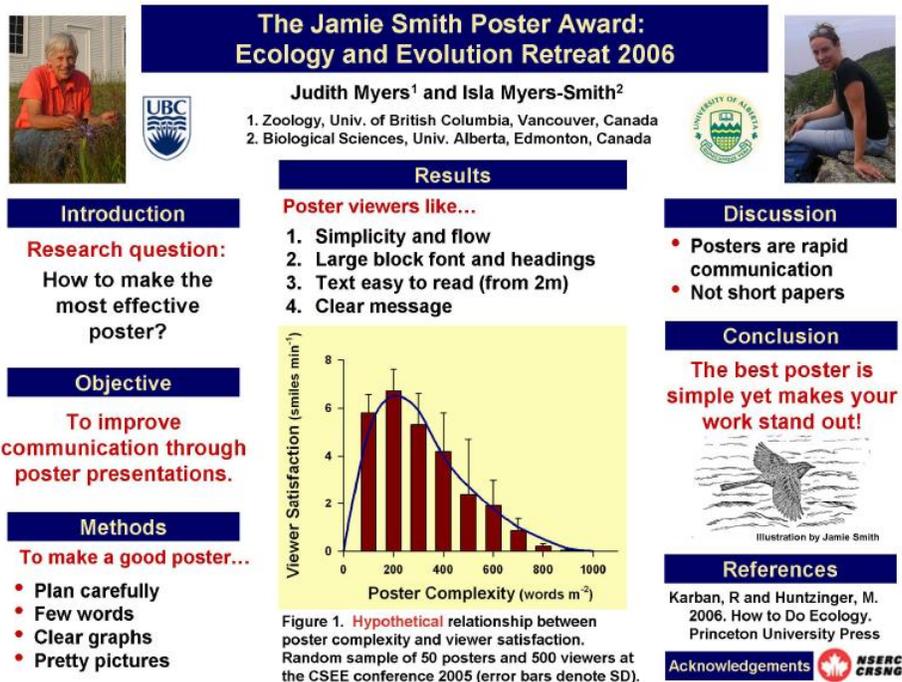


Fig. 2. Sample poster of criteria for the Jamie Smith Poster Award, prepared for the UBC, SFU, and UVic Ecology and Evolution Retreat, 2006.

## **Tips for giving an excellent talk (oral presentation):**

Just as with a poster presentation, you cannot squish all the details of a scientific paper into a 12 minute oral presentation. Nor do you have to follow the same format as a scientific paper. This gives you the freedom to present your work in the most effective manner and be much more creative than you can be with a journal article. Therefore, take some time to think about the key message you want to present in your talk and how you want to present it.

### **1) What to include in your talk:**

- Think about your audience.
- Give enough background to pique the audience's interest in your introduction. Clearly state the questions you will study and how they relate to the larger questions in the field.
- If you have clear hypotheses, state them.
- In your methods and results, be as clear and concise as possible. This means you will have to simplify some of your methods and ideas (but not 'dumb them down'). Examples and metaphors can be powerful ways to convey complex ideas to a broad audience.
- A picture/video is worth a thousand words and helps maintain audience interest (especially if you have a charming study species).
- When displaying graphs always verbally introduce the X and Y axes to help orient your audience and walk them through the major data points you want to discuss.
- Inform the audience of how your data and findings fit into the broad field of study and take time for your conclusions and summary. Many scientists rush through the conclusions as they feel that they are being repetitive. However, this is the first time most of your audience has ever seen the data you presented, so it is new to them and they need to be reminded.
- Acknowledgements – you don't need to read through every name on your list. Just present the slide and thank the major contributors, the audience can read the other names.

### **2) Making your slides:**

- Present clear, easy to read slides by following the same tips listed above for posters (minimize text, make sure slides and graphs are readable from the back of the room, and have text with good contrast to the background). If in doubt, always use dark text on a white background.
- Don't present an outline in a 12-15 minute talk.
- Stay away from animations/gifs that distract from your message.
- Unless you are a very talented designer, simpler is always better.

**3) After you have your 1<sup>st</sup> draft, get feedback** - Practice your talk a week or two before the conference so that you have lots of time for corrections. It is common practice to completely rearrange a talk during the first feedback session, so don't take this personally.

**4) Practice, practice, practice** - Practice the key points you want to make on each slide. Some people write out what they are going to say verbatim and others only write out major points in their notes. Do whatever works best for you. Do not read from notes if at all possible.

**5) Do not go over-time** - This cannot be stressed enough. There are often concurrent sessions at our annual meetings so if you do not stay on time your audience may leave early and miss out on your conclusions and be a bit annoyed. You will also miss out on your questions. While questions are a source of stress to many students, they are critical for improving your research. Society members are well aware you are a student and ask questions because they are genuinely interested in your research and want to help you make it even better!

**6) Answering questions** - Listen. Too often nervous scientists don't actually listen to what is asked of them. Ask for clarification if you need it and then respond to the best of your ability. If you can't answer the question there it is okay to be honest and say, "Excellent question and I am not sure of the answer right now but will look into this right after this session and get back to you as soon as possible". A great way to prepare for questions is to think of the top ten questions you would ask yourself.

- 7) **Prepare for technical glitches** - Save your presentation in many places. Save your presentation as a pdf, just in case there are compatibility issues. Load up your presentation early and look at your presentation on the computer you will be using. Take the time to visit the room you are presenting in prior to your talk, so you can familiarize yourself with the space.
- 8) **Presenting** - Speak clearly and slowly and make eye contact with your audience. Try to minimize distracting movements (jangling coins in your pocket, waving around laser pointers) and vocal ticks (“Ummm”, “Uh”, “So”). Act professionally.

**For more information, check out the following websites and articles:**

Charles Krebs. Hints for giving an effective talk or poster. Available as a pdf from: [http://csee-scee.ca/?page\\_id=105](http://csee-scee.ca/?page_id=105)

Kendall Powell. 2012 “Billboard science” Nature, 483: 113-115.  
<http://www.nature.com/naturejobs/science/articles/10.1038/nj7387-113a>

Jamie Smith et al. 2007 “Ecology 101: Tips for Effective Communication in Ecology” Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America, 88 (2):206-215.  
<http://www.esajournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1890/0012-9623%282007%2988%5B206%3ATFECIE%5D2.0.CO%3B2>

Colin Purrington’s website: <http://colinpurrington.com/tips/academic/posterdesign>

What not to do during a talk, from Bethany Brookshire’s Blog, Neurotic Physiology:  
<http://scientopia.org/blogs/scicurious/2011/11/08/repost-sfn-neuroblogging-and-now-a-powerpoint-presentation/>

Post on giving a good talk from the Gonzalez lab at McGill University: <http://ecodrift.blogspot.ca/2011/05/one-talk-wonder.html>

Video from Neil Dodgson on giving a great presentation: <http://vimeo.com/7833850>

Six things you should never say during a speech, JACQUELINE WHITMORE - [http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/small-business/sb-managing/leadership/six-things-you-should-never-say-during-a-speech/article18824132/?cmpid=rss1&click=sf\\_globe#dashboard/follows/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/small-business/sb-managing/leadership/six-things-you-should-never-say-during-a-speech/article18824132/?cmpid=rss1&click=sf_globe#dashboard/follows/)