Presenting your research

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Thinking of a novel research idea, finding the resources to conduct it effectively and then getting it published in a renowned journal is a long list of tasks for today's researcher. If you are following the 'Learning Research' series you have been guided regarded each of these steps. However, the work of a good researcher does not end here.

Next comes the important yet tedious task of further sharing your findings with your peers through a poster or an oral presentation at medical conferences. A new researcher often does not know how to spot such opportunities. The simplest solution in today's high technology world is to set up word alerts in famous search engines. As soon as any organizer launches their conference website the search engines sends you an e-alert to your email account. Groomed researchers on the other hand are much more focused in their fields and keep track of specific specialty societies who hold such scientific gatherings.

After getting to know about an upcoming conference one should check for the costs and benefits of the effort. Often funding opportunities are also announced simultaneously. If not one can write to granting organizations. The upside of going to conferences is networking, and meeting likeminded professionals who can enhance your experience. Appreciative audiences provide feedback on your work that can help you propagate as a researcher.[1,2] Depending on the content of your work and the public speaking skills, you can submit an abstract for evaluation. It is often the conference's scientific committee which decides whether it should be presented orally or through a poster.

Here we are briefly describing both forms of presentation.

Poster Presentation

Poster presentation is usually the path most commonly travelled. It follows a sequence of events starting from your aim for the presentation, judging criteria, planning out the poster, making it according to the conference instructions, using soft wares and getting it printed.

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Planning Out the Poster

The key is to read the organizers' instructions with undivided attention. Their websites explicitly tell you what they would want to include in the conference. Specific themes are followed and abstract selections are done accordingly. Poster size and orientation are also mentioned according to the display arrangements that are made by the organizers.[2,3]

Designing the Poster

Once the abstract is selected, a soft copy of your poster is sometimes required to be submitted. Even for that the format of the computer file is mentioned by the organizers. Soft wares include PowerPoint, LaTeXandFrameMaker.[2,3] Exact size of the poster, font and size of the text and diagrams, background colour all are details that one should consider if aiming to be successful. Size depends upon how much area the conference venue has for the poster display and number of presenters. Layout of the poster either horizontal or longitudinal also depends on the same.[3-5]

A good poster should be easy to read with only relevant text.[2] Left align the text with double space.Use larger or coloured font for emphasis. Bullets are better than paragraphs. Try to use no more than 2 different font styles. Calibri or Arial Narrow are preferable. Avoid italics.[2,4] If the title is too long, shorten it, do not reduce the font size. The size of the text should be enough for a person to read but not take up the entire space.[3] Suggested font sizes are given in Table.[2]

Make the graphics large enough for viewing from at least 3 feet away.[2] Text should support graphics not vice versa.[4] Use heavier lines in tables and graphs for easier viewing.[3] Figures and tables need to be simple with proper labels not overloaded with information.

Use one background colour to coalesce the overall look of the poster. Muted colours should be used. Avoid red-green combinations.[2] Do not overuse colour and be consistent.[3,4] Poster content includes title, authors and affiliations, Introduction, methods, data and results, conclusion and future work, finishing with references and acknowledgements.[2] Some conference organizers change this customary way of presentation and mention

Table: Suggested Font Size.[2]

Poster Component	Size
Title	96
Authors	72
Affiliations	36-48
Section headings	36
Text	24
Acknowledgement	18

so in their instructions.

Proofread, spell check and get feedback before printing. Keep track of your timeline when getting the printing done as sometimes the printed poster needs to be adjusted again.[2,4]

Presenting your Poster

Your contact information should be stated as it is humanly impossible to stand next to your poster at all times when it is on display.[3] Remember to hand out business cards,handouts, miniature of the poster or additional details not included in the poster. However, it is of utmost importance to be there when the judges are marking your work. You should be ready to answer any question they raise with confidence and good interpersonal communication skills.[5,6]

Oral Presentation

If you are presenting your work verbally in front of an audience, you must practice before time. Know your audience. Think about the best way to reach out to them.

Making your PowerPoint Presentation

Your PowerPoint presentation needs to be clear in each slide and content. Keeping the objective, subject, audience, place, time of the day and length of the talk in mind.[6] The presentation should be in bullets with no more than 7 bullet points on each slide. Light background and dark letters are acceptable. Again red-green combination needs to be avoided. The figures and tables should be simple as in the other forms of presentation. The animation option can be used to pin point part of the diagram you want your audience to see. At the start of the presentation an interesting picture can be used to charge up the crowd.

Presenting your PowerPoint Presentation

Know your presentation like the back of your hand. Do not read of the slides. Practice before a friend and try to be fluent and focused. If the venue is available ahead of time go there to practice and reduce your stage fright. Like conversations have ice breakers, presentations need eye-openers in between a long boring topic which might put the crowd to sleep. This is often true for the post-lunch presentations. It gets the presenter thinking whether it is his talk that is putting the people to sleep or the food. Your dressing should be kept strictly professional with firm control over your voice. It should be calm and relaxed.[6] Upload your presentation before hand and keep an online backup if the portable device gives up on you.

After the Verbal Presentation

After confidently presenting your research be prepared for all possible questions from the audience and judges. If your nerves start getting the better of you pause, drink water, smile, self-massage on your forehead or use visualization techniques.[6]

Be it any type of presentation, relax and be confident. Getting your abstract selected for presentation is an achievement on its own. Your next presentation would improve through learning from your mistakes in the first one. So, do not shy away from presentations and let the world know what you are doing in the field of medical research.

Reference

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