PURPOSES OF CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- To educate others about your work.
  - Research findings.
  - Program components/evaluation.
  - Talent (e.g., art, architect, interior design, apparel design).
- To get feedback/critique from peers before writing and submitting a manuscript for publication.
- To network with scholars interested in similar research or in the same field.
  - Meet students/faculty from potential future graduate programs.
  - Develop collaborations.
- To promote your work and yourself prior to applying to graduate school or going on the job market.
  - Build up your vita (i.e., extended resume used in academia).
  - Do not mix conference presentations with campus presentations, invited presentations, or publications.
    - Listing campus presentations, conference presentations, and publications together demonstrates that you do not know the difference between them.
  - If you have enough conference presentations, you could organize them by level (e.g., international/national, regional/state).
  - Use one standard bibliographic form for presentations (e.g., APA).

  ▪ American Psychological Association formatting example:

  ▪ American Medical Association formatting example:
    Seuss T. Eating green eggs and ham for a high protein and low carb diet. Poster presented at: 25th Annual American Medical Association; March 5, 2019, Springfield, MA.

- Can you have too many presentations when applying to graduate school or an academic position?
  - Depends on the discipline
  - Too many conference presentations without a publication might send one of the following messages:
    (a) The student might not know how to take a conference presentation and turn it into a publication.
    (b) The advisor might not trust the student's ability to go to the next level (i.e., publication).
    (c) The advisor might not know how to help the student go to the next level.

SOME TYPES OF CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- Paper (oral) presentations
  - Scholars present their work orally to a group of attendees.
  - The audience is often 15-50 participants.
  - A paper (oral) presentation is assigned to a group of similar presentations with 3-5 other presentations.
    - 3-5 presentations (12-20 minutes each).
    - A moderator gives a brief overview of all the presentations.
    - Question and answer session from the audience.
  - The typical length is generally around 75-90 minutes.
  - Advantages
    - Can highlight your group presentation skills; this is especially important if you are on the academic job market.
    - Likely to have more people who hear your whole presentation.
    - Often easier to communicate your message during a paper presentation/workshop.
    - Some view these formats as more prestigious than posters.
  - Disadvantages
    - Some may be unable to stay for the whole session; thus, they skip the session so they don’t enter late or leave early.
    - There may not be time to ask for attendees to ask questions.
- Poster presentation
  - Scholars present their work as a visual display (i.e., poster).
  - There are often many other posters in the same room at the same time (50-100).
  - The typical length is 45-90 minutes.
  - Interested people come to the poster to talk with the presenters individually.
Conference Presentation Tips

- **Advantages**
  - Has the potential to reach larger numbers of people than a typical paper presentation. An appealing poster can interest people who walk by who might not be in your specific field or research.
  - Allows you to interact one-on-one with people interested in your work.
  - Allows a potential faculty advisor to check out your competence prior to admission decisions.
  - Potentially provides more time to present your work because an interested person might stay longer than the 12-20 minutes allotted in most paper sessions.

- **Disadvantages**
  - So many posters for scholars to choose from, so they don’t get to your poster.
  - Can be challenging to communicate effectively given all the background noise and people coming and going.
  - Devoting too much time with one person takes time from others who are potentially interested in your research.
  - Interested scholars might skip your poster if you are engaged with others.
  - Some view posters as less prestigious than paper presentations.

- Online poster presentations take many different forms:
  - Presenters give a short talk, just like in a paper presentation;
  - Each poster is listed with a virtual link, and then attendees can join in any time during the designated period;
  - Posters are provided in a slide format instead of a large page with all the slides.

- **Poster/Paper Symposium**
  - A group of scholars work together to propose and present a group of 4-5 presentations on the same topic.
  - The submission to the conference will include a summary of each presentation and an overview of how the presentations all fit together.

- **Roundtable**
  - Scholars present their work to a small group sitting at a table with them.
  - Every 30 minutes, attendees switch tables, and the presentation starts again with a new group at the table.
  - The typical length is 90 minutes (3 roundtable presentations).
  - Generally, 5-10 people at the table.

- **Data blitz**
  - Scholars present their work orally in a group setting in 3-5 minutes (the overall session is usually 75-90 minutes).
  - This format allows more scholars to present their work in the allotted time.
  - There is a “question and answer” session after all the presenters are done.

- **Workshop**
  - Scholars present their work in a group setting; generally to practitioners in their field.
  - The goal is often to teach a set of skills or general information relevant to the attendees (e.g., new program, how to use a new technology).
  - The whole session is devoted to the workshop (90-180 minutes).

**Purposes of a Visual Presentation**
- Keep in mind the following purposes of a visual presentation:1
  - To connect with the viewers;
  - To direct and hold the attention of the viewers; and
  - To enhance the viewers’ understanding and memory by providing easily digestible information.

- Presentations should accentuate the most important information (i.e., the “take away message”).
  - However, in a presentation, don’t just provide information that supports your point while intentionally leaving off conflicting results or nonsignificant results.

**Planning a Conference Presentation**
- Work with your faculty mentor and/or peer mentor to plan the presentation.
  - Identify the “so what?” (i.e., the message you want to convey).
- Identify the place you want to give your presentation.
  - **Campus symposium**
    - Many departments, colleges, and universities have student poster/paper presentations
    - CSUN has the Annual Student Research and Creative Works Symposium
      - [https://www.csun.edu/research-graduate-studies/csunposium](https://www.csun.edu/research-graduate-studies/csunposium)
  - **Professional conference**
    - Look at conferences (e.g., annual meetings, biennial meetings) for professional associations in your discipline.

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1 Kosslyn, S. M. (2007). *Clear and to the point: 8 psychological principles for compelling PowerPoint presentations*. Oxford University Press.
Conference Presentation Tips

- National conferences (e.g., American Psychological Association) have more prestige than regional conferences (e.g., Western Psychological Association). They also allow more opportunity to network with scholars in your field.
- If it is your first conference, you might consider a local, state, or regional affiliate of your professional organization. They are a good way to network with more local faculty, and they often have more student presenters.
- However, it takes the same amount of effort to do an international/national conference presentation as it does to do a regional conference presentation. Thus, I encourage my students to submit to national conferences.

- Look at the criteria for submission (e.g., call for submissions, call for proposals)
  - Identify the deadline for submission, word/page count, key words, title criteria, etc.
  - Deadlines are often 6-9 months ahead of the presentation ... except for local or regional conferences which might be fewer months ahead of time.

- Writing and submitting the proposal
  - Follow the rules exactly (e.g., word/page count, deadlines).
  - Try to tie your submission to the conference theme.
  - Consider your target audience.
    - If the attendees are mostly researchers, then make sure you give sufficient information about your statistics, results, and research implications.
    - If the attendees are mostly practitioners in your field (e.g., therapists, educators, community activists, business owners, entrepreneurs, managers, critics), then make sure you explain how your work can benefit the practitioners.

- Submit the proposal and then wait, and wait some more (sigh).

- If/When accepted, start working on the presentation immediately.
  - Examine the guidelines provided by the conference (e.g., required sections, length, formatting, content).
  - For posters, see if your university or the professional organization has poster templates already developed.
  - Make an outline with your mentor.
  - Develop the presentation ahead of time so you have plenty of time to critique and revise, and also have time for others to edit the presentation.

  - Plunk’s opinion: I generally have my lab complete their presentations many weeks ahead of time. This way we have plenty of time to review the presentation slides. It also gives the department/college plenty of time to print the poster (i.e., beats the rush).

Ethics

- The same presentation should not be presented at multiple conferences.
  - Most conferences have explicit policies, for example, the 2020 APA conference states:
    - Except by invitation, a presentation previously published or read at any state, regional, or divisional meeting may not be presented at APA 2020 unless it is a substantial elaboration (additional findings, etc.) of a preliminary report. A presentation submitted to APA for consideration may not be submitted simultaneously for consideration at a regional, state, or divisional meeting.
  - Don’t recycle clever names for presentations as it will look like you are presenting the same study in multiple venues.

- Do not list your name on a presentation as a coauthor/co-presenter unless you had an active role in the research and/or development of the content of the presentation.
  - Make sure that all individuals who contributed are listed as coauthors/co-presenters (or get an acknowledgement).
  - Many labs include lab members on a presentation, even if they did not take an active part in the research/presentation. Faculty and lab supervisors may think they are doing their mentees a favor, but it sets a poor example and could set the mentee up for failure when they are asked about the research at the conference or at a future interview.

- Give citations on a presentation when paraphrasing other’s work just like you would in a manuscript.
  - Use an appropriate style (e.g., APA) when citing.

Professional Behavior

- Dress professionally when presenting – especially if you are a student applying to graduate programs or teaching/research positions. You never know who might stop by to see your presentation and to meet you.
- Be on time for your presentation
- Wear your nametag!

For poster presentations

- Wear comfortable shoes since you will be standing for a while.
- Stay close to your poster during the session so you are available for discussion.
- Take your poster down at the end of the time.
- Smile and make eye contact with people who pass the poster.
- Greet viewers and offer to answer any questions they may have.
  - Allow the viewers time to read the poster without interruption.
  - If they ask you a question or look like they have a question, then that is your cue to engage them about your poster.
- Don’t get too involved with one person and ignore others who might want to discuss your poster.
Conference Presentation Tips

• **For paper presentations**
  - Watch the other presenters in your session and give appropriate support conversation (e.g., head nods, eye contact).
  - End your paper presentation with the allotted time.
• **Have a copy of the poster and/or draft of the paper available** (e.g., hard copy, disc, electronic copy) for interested scholars.
  - Have a sign-up sheet.
  - Prefer to leave business cards for their copy, so have an envelope in which to put the cards.
  - Be sure and email them a copy as soon as possible (preferably as soon as you get access to the internet).
• **Don’t take criticism personally.**
  - One of the purposes of a conference presentation is to get critique prior to submitting for publication.
  - Also, many scholars who attend the conference sessions are there to mentor novice researchers. So, they may be giving constructive criticism as a way to help enhance your professional development.
• **If you don’t know the answer to a question, one option is to mirror the question back.**
  - For example, if a person asks, “Don’t you think the variable A could be related to B because of C?” You could respond with, "Hm interesting. Could you tell me more about why you think this?"
• **If individuals offer constructive critique, then take their advice into consideration.**
  - For example, if a person asks, “Have you thought about running blank analysis?” or “Maybe A is related to B because of E.” You could respond, “That is interesting. I had not thought of that. I will definitely consider that.”
• **Networking**
  - Hand out business cards to individuals who attend your session and/or leave them with other presenters when you want additional information.
  - If you are attending someone else’s presentation, don’t dominate their attention when other attendees are there.
  - Network with potential faculty members and/or their students at professional conferences.
    - Although your agenda is to meet prospective faculty, those faculty also have an agenda (e.g., networking with colleagues, helping their students meet faculty, presenting their research). Thus, be very conscientious and respectful of their time. In other words, meet them so they can put a face to your name, but don’t be a nuisance.

Sections of Research Poster or Paper

• **Heading** – Think strategically about the title to communicate your topic to others.
  - Help the conference attendees know whether your presentation is important to them.
  - Market your interests.
  - Market yourself on your job search materials (e.g., curriculum vita).
    - Poor title: Cars that don’t go VROOM!!!
    - Better title: Cars that don’t go VROOM!!! Marketing electric sports cars to young and old men in the USA
  - Poor title: Eye know what you see!
    - Better title: Eye know what you see: An evaluation of five eye-tracking software programs
  - Poor title: “Putting family first”
    - Better title: “Putting family first in school-based, parenting education programs”
    - Even better title: “Putting family first in school-based, parenting education programs for Middle Eastern, Asian, and Latino families”
  - Authors of the presentation
    - Authors should be listed in order of contribution.
    - Include the department and institution of each author.
• **Introduction**
  - Justification/Rationale
    - Why did you do this study/program? Who could benefit?
    - Invest time in explaining a compelling reason for the study/program rather instead of just showing past literature that found similar results.
  - **Purpose** – Exactly what did you do?
  - **Hypotheses or research questions** (if relevant)
    - If you are making a prediction, then you should present the alternative hypotheses.
    - If the study is exploratory, then you may want to provide research questions instead of hypotheses.
• **Program overview** (for program evaluation research)
  o Target population
    ▪ Gender, age, ethnicity, etc.
    ▪ Any other characteristics that may be of interest to the study or viewer/reader.
  o History of program
  o Mission of program
  o Implementation of the program
  o Results of any evaluation

• **Methodology**
  o **Procedures** – How were the data collected?
    ▪ Provide enough information so another researcher could replicate the study.
  o **Sample characteristics** (if human or animal research)
    ▪ Sample size
    ▪ Gender
    ▪ Age range and mean (or median if the age is skewed)
    ▪ Other characteristics that may be of interest to the study or viewer/reader (e.g., ethnicity, socio-economic status).
  o **Measures/Instrumentation** – How were the variables operationally defined?
    ▪ List variable, scale, number of items, response choices, and reliability (if applicable)

• **Results**
  o **Analyses** – Briefly provide the rationale for the analyses conducted.
  o **Findings** – Provide the findings in easy-to-read table(s), graphs, models, or concise bullets.

• **Discussion**
  o Identify the most interesting findings and provide an explanation/rationale.
    ▪ Why did this study/evaluation get the results?
    ▪ Is it similar to past research? Can theory explain the findings?
    ▪ Is there something about this data collection or sample that made the results different?

• **Limitations & Research Implications** (optional)
  o Limitations
    ▪ What are the problems with the current study or evaluation?
    ▪ How is this program/research different than other competing or similar programs?
  o Implications for research
    ▪ Based on the results and/or limitations of this study/program, what should future studies/programs do?

• **Practice Implications**
  o How can practitioners, educationers, policy makers, or researchers use this information?

• **Take-away message** (on poster presentations)
  o A newer trend is to put a take-away message for the poster in the middle of the poster.
    ▪ Plunk’s opinion: *I like this trend at traditional in-person conferences. It helps attendees who are walking by determine if they are interested in your poster beyond the title.*
  o Unfortunately (in my opinion), another trend is to ONLY put a take-away message without any other content.
    ▪ Plunk’s opinion: *I don’t like this because most of my questions usually revolve around procedures and measures.*

• **Acknowledgments**
  o Briefly and succinctly acknowledge the following:
    ▪ Individuals who assisted with the project/poster (e.g., statistical advice, critique of poster, fieldwork/lab help).
    ▪ Funding sources.
    ▪ Conflicts of interest.

**Sections You Probably Don’t Need on a Presentation**

• **Abstract**
  o Poster, paper, and workshop presentations should already be a concise abstract of your work.

• **Reference section / bibliography**
  o You don’t need a list of references on the presentation.
  o However, if you give a handout, then include reference section (i.e., works cited)

**Formatting of a Poster**

• Check the conference guidelines for formatting guidelines
  o Common sizes are 36” x 48” or 48” x 56”
• Wording
  o Don’t overwhelm the reader with too much information.
Conference Presentation Tips

- Use phrases instead of sentences as much as possible.
- Use bullets.
- Use appropriate grammar and spelling.
- Use active, not passive, verbs.

- Try to consolidate as much information as possible.
  - For example, if all of the authors of the presentation are from the same department and/or university, then there is no need to list it separately for each author. Just list it once.
  - If separate analyses found similar results, then try to consolidate the results into a table or concise summary of results.

- Avoid visual chaos that distracts the reader (e.g., numerous jagged edges, various-sized boxes and font sizes, gratuitous images).
- Provide visual cues to guide readers through your poster.
- In Western culture, readers will normally start at the top left and move to the right.
- Make it aesthetically pleasing (because it enhances a person’s desire to read it).
  - Use figures, diagrams, graphics, or easy-to-read tables to explain/illustrate ideas or findings.
    - Note: Using graphics downloaded from the Internet will often look terrible when printed; especially if you make the image bigger. Thus, ensure the graphic is .eps so it won’t look bad when printed.
    - Make sure images you use are public domain. Just because it is on the internet does not make it public domain.
    - Images should only be used when they complement/explain the subject matter.
  - Avoid background graphics that make the text difficult to read.
  - Use plenty of white space.
  - Maintain logical column alignments.

- Color
  - Color is encouraged but keep the number of colors limited to create an overall theme for the poster.
  - Use a light-colored background with black or dark-colored text printed.
  - If the posted will be printed, avoid dark backgrounds with white letters because it uses a tremendous amount of ink.

- Graphics
  - Use large enough print, graphs, charts, or designs to be read easily from a distance of at least 5 feet.
  - Don’t use a picture behind the text as it decreases readability.
- Use official university logos (e.g., wordmarks).
  - Universities typically have very strict guidelines for the use of logo. Thus, don't create your own university logo.
    - CSUN’s logo guidelines – https://www.csun.edu/identity/logo-marks
    - CSUN’s logo downloads – https://www.csun.edu/identity/downloads

- Fonts
  - Don’t mix a large number of fonts.
  - Use common fonts (e.g., Cambria, Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri) because you may not know which fonts will be on the computer that is used to print your poster.
  - All type should be a minimum font size of 18-point – preferably bigger.
    - Font at the same level (e.g., heading, first level bullet) should be the same size and type throughout the poster.
    - For example, if you make a slide heading 42-point, Arial Black font, then all slide headings should be the same. Similarly, if you make the text for a first-level bullet 32-point, Times New Roman, then all the other first-level bullets should be the same.
    - Plunk’s opinion: I use 40-48 for main headers, 30-32 point for main bullets, and 26-28 point for second-level bullets.
  - Do not use ALL CAPS since they are more difficult to read. Use SMALL CAPS instead.
  - Compare NATIONAL COUNCIL ON FAMILY RELATIONS to NATIONAL COUNCIL ON FAMILY RELATIONS
- You can find templates for posters at https://www.csun.edu/plunk/alab/posters.html
  - The templates are easy to customize with text, color, etc.
  - Do not adjust the page setup width and height on the templates as it will mess up the formatting of the textboxes.
  - Type in all the text before adjusting the sizes of the text boxes. It is easier to move things around once you know how much text will be in each box.

Miscellaneous

- Printing your poster – Printing your poster will require the use of a plotter printer. Check with your university to see if there are free or inexpensive ways to print on campus.
  - You will need to allow at least a week to print your poster in case there are unexpected glitches (e.g., plotter printer runs out of ink, no paper, a graphic or table on the poster is causing printing errors)
  - Paper vs. cloth
    - Paper posters are much cheaper to print, but they are more cumbersome to transport (see section below)
    - Cloth posters are more expensive to print, but are VERY easy to transport (just fold and put into your baggage)
**Tips when printing a PowerPoint poster**
- If you use a slide background that is a picture or a texture, it might create a large file that can exceed the plotter printer's memory and/or take a long time to print.
- Sometimes embedded Word tables, Excel charts, and Visio drawings in PowerPoint files don’t print correctly. You might convert them to images (JPEGs, TIFFs, EPS, PDF, etc.) before adding them to your slide.

**Transporting your poster** – There are many ways to transport your poster to conferences. The nice carrying cases can be quite expensive. There are also cardboard tubes for just a couple of dollars.
- Be sure and write your contact information on the poster in case it gets lost.
- Also, many people I know have inadvertently left their posters at bus stops (myself included), in the plane, in their car, etc. It is easy to forget since it is not part of our usual travel luggage. I write a note to myself on my boarding pass and on my hotel confirmation page that reminds me to check that I still have my poster tube.
- Also, carry your poster on the plane instead of checking it as luggage (if possible).
  - Airlines are notorious for losing poster tubes since they can roll around. And, this will possibly save money given the fees for checked luggage on many airlines.
  - Some airlines have restrictions on poster tubes as a carryon and/or charge a fee for carrying posters on the plane (ugh!).
  - If others are going to the same conference, put multiple posters in one tube to save space and/or fees.
- Options instead of transporting posters to conference:
  - Mail the poster(s) to the hotel.
  - Mail the poster to someone who is attending the conference who lives close to the conference location.
  - Email the poster to a printing place close to the conference hotel and have them print the poster.

**After the conference** – Many departments and/or research labs like to display the posters after the conference. So, check with your major advisor to see if you should transport the poster back from the conference.

**Some Online Resources for Poster Presentations**
- Poster templates – https://www.csun.edu/plunk/alab/posters.html
- Poster design tips and examples – https://colinpurrington.com/tips/poster-design/
- Giving a good scientific presentation – https://asp.org/education/EffectivePresentations.pdf
- Creating effective poster presentations – https://sites.google.com/ncsu.edu/effective-posters/

**Recommended Reading**