



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Positive Posters

Date: May 2006

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U. S. Library of Congress ISSN: 1539-1833

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Welcome

This month consider me the Poster child for poster sessions. Traditionally, medical and technical conferences have offered poster sessions. I am ready to explore using poster sessions in new ways for some of my meetings.

So if you have never heard of poster sessions or are ready to explore a new format for your meeting, I invite you to read on.

- This month's issue also marks my 6th year of publishing Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.). If you know of someone who would enjoy reading T.I.M.E., please forward your copy onto them. —

Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

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Post Your Poster

Poster sessions allow colleagues to share their expertise with large groups at conferences. Participants are invited to create a poster depicting their research. Poster sessions combine text and graphics to make a visually-pleasing presentation.

Poster creators share that information with others during an informal period when people walk around viewing the posters. Unlike the pace of a slide show or verbal presentation, a poster session allows viewers to study and reread information and discuss it with the poster creator one-on-one. Poster creators may also be required to give short presentations on their research every ten or fifteen minutes.

Poster sessions are traditionally offered at association meetings. They have been used extensively in the medical world, although I have seen examples in social sciences.

Why Poster Sessions = Innovative

Poster sessions offer 14 benefits for all types of meeting and events:

1. Participants get to pick and choose - People can wander about and stop at topics that are of interest to them. It's self-directed learning at its best.
2. Participants can vote with their feet - People can stop and look at a poster for as little time or as much time as they like. They can engage in conversation with the creator of the poster. It's easy to move on during a poster session without insulting the speaker.
3. The Right pace - Many presentations do not provide the audience with enough time to assimilate the statistical data or link it with other information. A poster can allow for a clearer and more reflective process of presentation, especially of statistical or visual information. In addition, the narrative of every poster, including main points and conclusions, can be highlighted and therefore absorbed at every person's own pace as they view the poster.
4. My question - A presentation rarely affords enough time to adequately field all questions. Audience participation is sometimes limited to question and answer periods. Usually only a few people are able to ask questions, and the presenter may not cover the concerns of the entire audience. A poster session allows for dialogue and engaging interaction.
5. Snippets may be the best - Speakers can drone on for interminable amounts of time. What if speakers were forced to encapsulate their comments into 10 minutes? That's in essence what poster sessions do – they force the presenter to get their main points out quickly and clearly.
6. A different way to learn - Poster sessions promote information through a visual medium not just words. Ideally poster sessions are graphically interesting and display information visually. The creator may be present to supplement the poster with conversation by answering questions from the participants.
7. Customized learning – Poster sessions give people the opportunity to customize their agenda in a way that is most valuable to them.
8. Forget the common denominator - A common problem in presentations is that speakers must provide sufficient background so the entire audience will understand the presentation. Poster sessions allow the creator to meet the

participant at their level of knowledge. And as a result, they each have the opportunity to discuss the full scope of the research or results and implications.

9. Leading-edge issues covered - What if your agenda and speakers are determined months in advance? That's good from a planning perspective but you lose something in being able to cover the newest information. Poster sessions offer you the flexibility to program to current issues.
10. Variety at a quick pace - Often when I am planning meetings, it seems that there is so much I would love to cover but time on the agenda just doesn't allow. Poster sessions create the opportunity to include a wide breadth of topics without overwhelming the audience with information overload.
11. Responsive to the group - Poster sessions afford you the opportunity to be responsive to individual needs, interests and topics.
12. Highlight the expertise of your group Poster sessions give lots of people the opportunity to highlight their expertise and knowledge. Imagine the great new connections that can be created when people discover each other during a poster session.
13. Poster sessions are a consideration to foreign colleagues - The poster session allows foreign colleagues another format to present. If Asian, European, African or Latin American colleagues are less comfortable with a formal presentation in English, poster sessions offer them an alternative. Likewise, for Americans participating in an international conference.
14. Feedback Loop - Posters can provide the creator with much more feedback than she or he would receive during a traditional presentation.

Everyone benefits from poster sessions - the participants, the planners and the creators of posters.

Adapting Poster Sessions

The concept of a poster session is not restricted to technical or medical meetings. Here's how I have used the concept to create innovative meetings:

- Posters as a source for additional resources - Often when I deliver 180 Ways to Transform your Meetings, I will post additional resources on the walls. This gives people something to look at, adds color to the walls and gives people the opportunity to explore a topic in more detail if they are interested. (If you are interested in this 1.5 - 3 hour presentation, email me to reserve a date at stinnish@ameritech.net or click here [180 Ways](#))
- Posters as a review technique - Recently I was leading a training session. Part of the final day was devoted to reviewing the past three sessions. Rather than have me drone on and repeat information that I already said (how boring), I created learning stations for each topic. I created a short quiz that reminded

people of the key elements from that topic and I also provided additional reading material on the topic. Participants were invited to spend as much or as little time as they wanted at each visual display. (I could have posted the articles and resources on poster board. As it was, I opted for simplicity and posted the articles and paper on the table at each station.) Soft music played in the background as people reviewed at their own pace. As an instructor, I didn't force anyone to review material that they felt they knew cold. Additionally at each station, I had a reflection sheet with the following questions:

1. I learned....
2. I relearned...
3. I was surprised at...
4. I intend to...

This type of poster session also allowed people to reflect and remember what they learned. Often our meeting agendas are so crammed with information, there is little time for the participants to stop and think about what they learned.

- Posters at a trade show - I am planning on turning a small trade show on its side in August. Rather than have people (vendors) passively standing by their table top displays and everyone avoiding eye contact, I intend to extend the educational format into the trade show. Each vendor will have the opportunity to prepare poster displaying their expertise in a specific area. Rather than beginning conversations about whether there is interest in doing business together, the participants will have the opportunity to learn something of value from the vendors. From that relationship, both parties can explore other avenues.
- Best Practices Showcase - Learn from peers by using a poster session to showcase best practices, great ideas, or other examples that can benefit the entire group. This type of session can be motivating to the creators of the poster and create some great suggestions for everyone.
- Virtual Poster Sessions - The fastest growing variation of the poster session is the Internet session. Creators prepare posters about their work and post them on the Web. Instead of walking around viewing others' posters at a conference, participants of the virtual poster session view others' posters online. Electronic forums then allow participants to ask questions of the poster authors.

Top 3 How To's

The three most important guidelines for creating posters sessions are these:

- Make it visually interesting - Typically, the less text, the more appealing the poster is. Viewers can take in visual information much more quickly than they can read text, so use graphics extensively on a poster.
- Focus, Focus, Focus - Unlike a research-based paper, a standard poster

session will include only about 3-4 pages of single-spaced text. Poster creators have very little space to fill, particularly if they have to explain complex ideas or research. The key to crafting a good poster, then, is to focus as narrowly as possible on the central ideas.

Creators of posters should question themselves about the audience and maintain that focus as they flesh out the poster material. Keep the audience in mind as the central focus. If a poster sends a muddled message or takes too long to figure out, viewers won't bother to work through the confusion. Instead, they'll move on to the next poster. Check for the audience-centric focus by avoiding jargon and promoting clarity through the sentence length, connections, and clarity.

- Make it BIG – Cover the BIG points in BIG text. Ensure that the main points are legible from afar. Use at least 72 point font for the title, and 36 point font for the subtitles. Use 14 or 18 point font for the text. All lettering should be at least one inch high.

Make text easy to read by grouping information in bullets, lists, or short paragraphs and use clear headings throughout. Don't include complete explanations of complex ideas on a poster, but use text to convey key points. Elaborate on key points in discussion/interaction with viewers. For conclusions, focus on a central finding that lends itself to discussion.

Detailing Posters

While I have offered my Top Three Hints above, there are many more suggestions to creating great posters. I researched using posters effectively for my own events. I found several great websites which I have borrowed from liberally to construct this list of details for creating posters:

Colorado State University at
<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/speaking/poster/pop9b.cfm>

Carol Waite Connor's suggestions at <http://www.sou.edu/aaaspd/PosterPrep.html>

Use these tips to create your own poster guidelines for your meetings:

Readability

- Divide the contents of your poster into appropriate sections. For instance: title, author, abstract, methodology, data, results and conclusions. Include each section on a separate sheet(s) of paper.
- Flow information from left to right and from top to bottom. This is how participants are expecting the information. If the flow is different, offer explicit signals on the poster.
- Use left-justified text. Block or newspaper text looks nice from a distance, but is more difficult to read. Ultimately, the participants will be standing and reading

close in.

- Make a strong visual presentation. A computer is an excellent tool for preparing material for posters. However, standard software output is poor material for posters. The standard type size is too small and the line weight is too thin. Instead use computer programs to print out results and then enlarge the results. Stick-on tape can also enliven graphics.
- Avoid fonts that are script or difficult to read.
- Use a black felt-tip pen, like a Sharpie, if hand lettering is required.
- Don't use glossy paper because reflections will make the content more difficult to read.
- Edit out, when in doubt - crowded cluttered posters are difficult to read. Remember, make sure every item in the poster is necessary. A poster should stimulate discussion, not offer a long presentation.

Color

Color is a complex a subject and people have their own preferences. However, this is what I am using for my poster session as guidelines on color.

- Be conservative with color. Any color can be used attractively, within some constraints. Use a colored background to unify your poster. Don't use too much color. The viewer's eye will jump erratically around the poster instead of tracking through it to the crucial points.
- Use muted colors, or shades of gray for the background. Use more intense colors as borders or for emphasis. A splash of color here and there, perhaps highlighting central finding(s) or provocative results, will make your poster "stand out". But remember to be judicious with color.
- Use primary colors (not shocking pinks and yellows).
- Use complementary colors (yellow and purple, red and green, orange and blue) as a background to text and art work.
- Use a light background with darker photos; a dark background with lighter photos. Use a neutral background (gray) to emphasize color in photos; a white background to reduce the impact of colored photos.
- Use background colors to unify different subject areas of the poster.
- Adjust for lighting. Most poster sessions are held in areas lit with fluorescent light. If exact colors are important to the data, balance those colors for use with fluorescent lighting. Also, all colors will be intensified; bright (saturated) colors

may become unpleasant to view.

Design

- Use headings and subheadings to label information. Keep these short and to the point since they function as an index.
- Use blank space to highlight or offset information. Align all edges of paper. Place related materials close together, then offset it by surrounding it with blank space.
- Space your information proportionally. A good way is to divide the poster either horizontally or vertically into three or four sections, and place materials within those sections.
- Utilize color, arrows or numbers to direct the viewer's eyes from one section to the next in a logical sequence. Experiments with various layouts for clarity and aesthetics.

Misc.

- Prepare a handout to accompany the poster session. This can be a reproduction of the text displayed, or it might be a full research paper or it might be an abstract, providing a summary of the work . Do not limit handouts to written documents; samples, a list of related references or an activity guide are excellent handouts.
- Advise the poster creators on how they will mount their posters. When in doubt, ask them to bring various types of adhesive materials to be sure that they can attach the poster.

Freebies: Printing and More Learning

I found two companies that specialize in creating posters for poster sessions. Basically, they produce research posters for medical and scientific poster sessions from PowerPoint® and all common graphic design programs. They offer several templates which allow you to insert your content, copy and paste your text, pictures, charts and graphs into the template and send the file to them for printing.

The two options are: makesigns.com and postersession.com

I have used with great success FedEx Kinko's Meeting Services department for posters for several meetings. I met my contact Glinda Wehrle (888-661-4038,

glinda.wehrle@fedexkinkos.com) at a Meeting Professionals International Chicago meeting and she has never failed to help me source professional materials for my events. I would highly recommend their services – the best part is delivery to your meeting site so to minimize my efforts.

Freebies: More Poster Session Resources If you are interested in more in-depth reading about poster sessions, email me and I will send you a short resource list. Either send your request to stinnish@ameritech.net or click here [Poster Session Resources](#)

Future T.I.M.E.

I will speaking at [Affordable Meetings](#) on Wednesday, June 14, 2006 at 1:15 pm – 2:30 pm in Long Beach, California, Come see me if you will be at that show. You can register at <http://www.affordablemeetings.com/west/register.htm> [Affordable Meetings](#)

I will also be at [EMC's MEET - Washington DC](#) during July 20 & 21 at the Inn & Conference Center at University of Maryland University College by Marriott in Adelphia, MD.

On November 15, I will be at the [Society of Government Meeting Planners Michigan Chapter](#) in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

I love to see familiar faces in the audience. Please come and see me.

In addition to writing and publishing T.I.M.E., I am also the founder and organizer of a women's networking and golfing group. Our activities include clinics, golfing (May - October) and social events during the cold months. We golf in the North/Northwest suburbs of Chicago. If you are interested in joining our fun, supportive group of women golfers, please email me and I will send you information about our upcoming schedule. [The Links Golfing Group](#) Or see our informational website at: http://www.promos4biz.com/the_links_2006.asp
[The Links Golfing Group](#)

T.I.M.E. Gone By

If you are interested in past issues, please e-mail us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter. Here's what is included in past issues ([Back Issue Request](#)):

2000

Teambuilding (May), Green Meetings (June), Values (July), Minimum/Minimal Meetings (August), Evaluations (October), Politics (November), and Toys (December)

2001

Sales, Award Presentations (January), Change and Communicating Change (February), Open Space Technology (March), Adult Learning Styles (April), Trade Shows (May), Emotional Intelligence (June), Presentation Tips (July), Ice Breakers (August),

Facilitation (September), Humor (October), Customer Care (November), Slack (December)

2002

Teambuilding Options (January), Promotional Products (February), Multicultural Communication (March), Outdoor Learning (April), Budgets and ROK (May), Creativity (June), High Touch Technology (July), Economic and Business Cycles (August), Successful Environmental Factors/Conference Centers (September), Return on Investment (October), Incentive Meetings (November), Resource Recap (December)

2003

Everyday Meetings (January), Diversity (February), Problem Solving (March), Marketing Pre- and Post- Event (April), Entertainment (May), Balance in Meetings and child care (June), Mobile Events (July), Last Minute Ideas (August), Training Meetings (September), Unique Venues (October), Data, Information and Number Crunching Privacy (November), Deja View (December)

2004

Branding (January), Audio Visuals (February), Networking (March), Strategic Budgeting (April), Sensory Meetings (May), Board Meetings (June), Leadership (July), Barrier-free Meetings (August), Time Management & Meetings (September), The Travel Experience & Stress (October), Voting Techniques (November), Deja View II (December)

2005

New Year's Resolutions (January), Brainy Side of Food and Beverage (February), Sarbanes-Oxley and Meetings (March), Visual Aids (April), Experiential Teambuilding (May), Emotional Meetings (June), Press Conferences (July), Green Meetings (August), International Meetings (September), Value of Entertainment (October), Copyright Laws (November), Deja View III (December)

2006

New Year's Resolutions (January), Generational Differences (February), Speaker Suggestions (March), Building Bridges (April)

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