

This Poster Could Make Your Poster More Effective: Rethinking Scientific Poster Design

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

Traditional academic posters are important for disseminating ideas, sharing research, and fueling the scholarly work in a specific discipline (Ilic & Rowe, 2013). Many academic posters are designed in a fashion which actually inhibits the transfer of ideas from researcher to conference attendees (Forsythe, Wright, Scherb, & Gaspar, 2010; Rowe, 2015). Traditional poster designs are often wordy, and include more information than can be quickly consumed in the allotted time for a poster session at many conferences (Rowe & Ilic, 2015). In order to further the information transfer intended by the presentation of academic posters, Mike Morrison, a researcher at Michigan State University proposed a radical new poster design which may allow more efficient transfer of information on scholarly posters (Greenfeld-Boyce, 2019).

Undergraduate and graduate researchers, working in a combined research methods class at [Institution] came across the new academic poster design concept in the Spring of 2019, when they were assigned to view a Youtube explanation video posted by Mr. Morrison. Subsequently, we decided to present two research and one innovative poster at the National meeting of the American Association for Agricultural Education in the new format. The positive feedback from the presentation of these posters has changed our outlook on academic posters and led to much conversation about how and why we might change the way scholarly posters are presented in agricultural education.

How it Works

The new design functions with three sections. First, the author condenses the poster abstract to one main concept. The main concept is placed largely at the center of the poster, in font large enough to be viewed from 20-30 feet, the average distance most conference attendees view posters when walking through a poster session at a conference. In addition to the main concept, the center portion of the poster also includes a QR code, which can be used to direct viewers to the poster abstract, poster pdf file, additional resources, background information or any other information the presenter would like to communicate. Numerous QR Code makers are easily available online for no cost.

The left-hand sidebar on the poster is designed to include all of the information included on a traditional poster. The introduction, theoretical framework, supporting literature, and conclusions can all be consolidated into bullets and placed in the left side bar section. Mr. Morrison called this section the “silent presenter” bar, and noted that the information should be complete enough for someone to gather the details about the study if the presenter is occupied by another interested attendee. The right-hand sidebar poster is reserved for information needed by the presenter to highlight and validate the main concept. This would include tables, graphs, instrument components, or any other things which could supplement the discussion between the poster presenter and an interested conference attendee. Mr. Morrison called this section the “ammo bar” and suggested using this information to help guide the conversation when someone approaches the poster.

The revised poster format is shown in Figure 1, which highlights the main concept (center) along with the silent presenter bar (left) and ammo bar (right).



Figure 1. Reinvented poster design suggested by Morrison (2019).

Results to Date/Implications

We presented three posters using a slightly modified version of this design at the AAAE Annual Conference in May 2019. As researchers, we found the design required us to truly examine the information we wanted to communicate, which was invaluable for student researchers, and required better preparation as we considered which items would be helpful to embed in the QR Code link. We spent less time worrying about design, and more time thinking about how our ideas could be communicated clearly. As presenters, we noted more visitors at our posters than previous conferences, and an increase in acknowledgement from those passing by. Many who did not approach for a conversation nodded or read the main concepts from our posters. Attendees of the AAAE conference visited our QR codes on average 27 times per poster, and a link shared to describe the new poster design was visited by 38 unique visitors.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

We plan to continue to present our posters using the new poster design, as we believe it more clearly helps us communicate findings to a larger percentage of the attendees at an academic conference. There are five posters being presented in this format at an upcoming student research conference in July 2019. Some important considerations for others include the increased time and thought to develop the main concept for the poster. We recommend allowing presenters to receive multiple sources of feedback from others about the specific wording for the main concept, and increase the amount of preparation time in order to be more ready to have in-depth conversations at the poster session based on increased interest.

Costs/Resources Needed

One of the best things about this design is that there is no cost above the traditional cost of printing a poster. Only Microsoft Powerpoint and a free online QR Code maker are required.

References

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