

Developing a Poster: A Brief Primer

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Introduction

It's your first conference and you're presenting a poster. Congratulations! There are a few things you should know about posters before you start. This document is split into three sections.

- 1) An overview of posters and the contexts in which they are viewed.
- 2) Information on how to get into a conference to present a poster.
- 3) A general layout for how to organize and create your poster.

There are a number of sample posters on the website and you should download a poster template for the lab as well before you start.

Part I: Considering Posters in a Broad Context

1. **Posters are not articles.** Though that may seem obvious, students often feel they need to include the same level of detail in a poster as would be found in an article. Not so! In fact, doing this will hurt you far more than help you. Less is more in this case. Remember, you'll be standing there to answer questions and explain things.

2. **Who said it?** You **do** need to include citations in your poster and there does need to be a section for list references! Only include the most necessary references as you don't have a lot of space. You should use the bare minimum of citations when giving background (introduction), to explain your hypotheses (present study), and give context to your discussion (discussion). Also, and this should go without saying, you must provide citations for all measures used in the study.

3. **Hi there. I saw your tables from across the room.** Tables and graphs are sexy! They grab attention and display a lot of information quickly. *They are the key to a good poster.* Frequently, people will come up and look at the title of your poster, briefly skim it, and then ask you to explain what you did and what you found. When you think about the tables and graphs for your poster, it is good to imagine how you would use them to answer questions and explain your results.

4. **Relax, you're not alone (for better or worse).** Poster sessions are very different from any other venue for presenting data. You will most likely be in a large room with anywhere from 40 to 400 other posters and people set up. People at poster sessions will usually have one or two things they really want to look at, and will then spend the rest of the time wandering, networking with colleagues, and possibly look over posters while having a beverage or two. ***This does not mean you can do shoddy work.*** We are representing the University and we need to do a good job. This should, however, put you at some ease knowing that there will be many other students there.

5. **What I should have said is, "I don't know, but..."** Sometimes students think they should know everything about the research they are doing. The truth is that if you don't know an answer to someone's question, then the best answer is: "I don't know." It is VERY rare for people to really

be overly critical of posters and students who present them. If you don't know an answer, say: "That's interesting. I'm not sure I know how to answer that." If they ask you about an idea or an analysis or if they make a suggestion, write it down. It's also very wise (and this is a good trick you will want to get good at to become a professional speaker) to ask: "What do you imagine we might find if we did that?" or "Do you have any ideas on what the relationship may be?" In other words, get them to talk about their idea with you. Then write down what they say! People often give you excellent ideas!!!! Never be so worried about making an impression that you miss a good opportunity to learn something.

6. It's also about who you don't know...and might like to know. Poster sessions are an incredible way for students to meet people! I met many colleagues whom I work with at poster sessions. You will be able to walk around and look at other peoples work. Talk to people who seem to have similar interests as you do. Also, talk to the people who set up their posters near you.

7. It's not all about your work. When you speak with others, be sure to ask about them. Find out what they are interested in. What are they doing here at the conference? Maybe you will be able to work together in the future? These relationships can get you access to data, resources, and greater exposure. So sure, talk about what you did, but be sure to make room for others to talk about what they did as well. Try to present at conferences that are somehow linked to your interests. You're more likely to meet folks there who are at graduate schools you may be applying to in the future.

8. Your contact information is important. If you have a card, bring it. If you don't bring have a card, bring several copies of a one-sheet word document version of your poster. Put *your email address and contact information at the bottom* ☺. Also, get this information from others. Then actually email them and follow up. People like to be remembered!!!!

9. Be strategic. Consistent with point #6 above, it is important to try and be strategic when selecting conferences and presenting data. Many of you are considering applying to graduate schools or medical school. It is important to demonstrate that you have some research experience. Presenting posters is a simple way to do that. Try to do as many as you can (use local poster sessions to increase the number on your CV and experience presenting). When possible and when cost is not a factor, try to rework your data in some way so that you can present more than 1 poster from your study. For one poster you might only look at some self-report measures. For the next, you might look at different measures. Try to present your strongest stuff at national conferences.

10. Get Seen. Simply being seen can really helpful in terms of graduate school. Anyone ever hear of the "mere exposure effect?" You haven't! I'm shocked! It was discovered right down the road at UM-AA! Essentially things you are exposed to, but don't necessarily focus a lot of attention on ...are more likely to be liked in the future (Explains bad pop music doesn't it ☺). Thus, if someone sees you and then a year later sees your name again on an application, well maybe it stands out to them just a little bit more. Now that's using psychology!

Part II: Key Dates: What must be done and when.

1. **Get into a conference:** Obviously you have to be accepted to present at a conference. Most deadlines are several months in advance. When you start collecting data, you should Google conferences related to your interests. I almost always go to the society of personality assessment (SPA) every year. Their conference is in March and the deadline for submission is usually in November or December. I also go to the Society for Psychotherapy Research (SPR) every other year. They usually meet in June, and their deadline is usually in January. Finally, there are at least two on campus poster sessions. There are many other conferences. You do NOT have to go to one that I go to.

2. **And the authors are...** Authorship is an important thing to establish early. The criteria for authorship on a poster is very low. Pretty much anyone who does work on the study, should be an author on the poster. In 95 out of 100 cases, the person putting the poster together should be first author. In 5 of 100 cases, the person who did all the work to get the data will be first author (even if they never write a word), but this is rare. Be liberal with poster authorship. However, just because someone is an author on a poster, it doesn't automatically entail that they will be an author on a manuscript. Those are two separate conversations.

3. **When do you analyze the data?** As soon as you can. Posters require less detailed analysis. Nonetheless, you should try to leave yourself a minimum of 3 days. Preferably, you want to be analyzing your data for about a week. When analyzing your data always remember three things:

1) What did I say I was going to look at in my abstract for this poster? Focus on that, and that alone.

2) What is/are my hypothesis/hypotheses? Less is more on a poster. Try to limit yourself to looking at one or two (and sometimes three) hypotheses max.

3) What will my tables/figures/graphs look like? Get examples from articles that have used similar data-analytic approaches. See how they create their tables. Do the same. Use color when you can! Use graphs when you can!

4. **Submit your PPT slide for printing 1 week in advance (or sooner).** At the moment, UM-D has a printer that will turn a PPT slide into a poster. You need to try and get them your PPT slide 1 week before you need it. For the time being, what I'm asking you to do is send me the slide and I will turn it in.

Part III. What the heck goes on a poster: Formatting suggestions.

You do not have to follow these exactly. Look at the examples on c-tools. This is a suggested (not required) format. Generally, a poster has the following sections:

1) Introduction/background

2) The present study & Hypotheses

3) Method

- Participants

- Measures
- Equipment (this is optional! It is mainly for studies that use EEG or other biometric equipment, computer equipment, monitoring devices, and/or projection devices.
- Procedures

4) Results

5) Discussion

6) References

Detailed discussion of what goes into these is below

INTRODUCTION:

Give me 7 BRIEF bullet points (each bullet 3 sentences max; include citations APA style 6th edition):

1 Bullet on why whatever you're studying is important theoretically

The rest of your bullets should give the reader background that either helps them understand why you are using these research methods and/or helps them understand the logic behind your hypotheses.

This usually takes the form of briefly reporting what other people found in their research on this topic. It is also common to cite people who have done something in a manner that is quite similar to how you are doing your study. These bullets should help to make your hypotheses clear (meaning to help people understand why we expect what we expect)

Present Study

This section should be pretty brief. It should essentially accomplish four things:

1) Clearly state the **purpose** of the study (e.g., The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between adult attachment dimensions and satisfaction in romantic relationships).

2) How does this study **relate to prior research** in this area. (e.g., This study seeks to replicate previous work demonstrating that secure attachment is related with greater satisfaction in relationships.)

3) What about the study is unique, **extends prior research**, or is interesting. (e.g., This study extends previous research in this area by using a narrative based task to measure attachment security.)

3) What are your **hypotheses**? (e.g., given prior research in this area we make the following three hypotheses: 1) Secure attachment as assessed on the narrative task will be positive related to self-report ratings of relationship satisfaction. 2) We predict that insecure attachment as assessed on the negative task will be negatively related to self-report ratings of relationship satisfaction).

Methods

The method section has three things that must be presented and reviewed.

1) **Participants**: How many people, where did you get them, what is the average age (with sd), what is the gender mix, and what is the ethnic/racial break up. If you have conditions, how many in each condition. (e.g., This study used a sample of 50 participants who were recruited using a university subject pool system. Participants had a mean age of 21 (SD = 4.46). Thirty-two participants were female and 28 were male. Regarding ethnicity, 70% described themselves as White/Caucasian, 11% as Hispanic, 8% as African-American, 5% as Asian, and 6% as Other.)

2) **Measures**: For each of the measures you use, you need to give the name, cite the authors (APA Style), purpose of the measure, number of items, and item format. If you have test-retest reliability for the measure (based on prior research) you should report this. Assuming the measure has been found to be valid and reliable (i.e. coefficient alpha > .70) you should simply state this and cite the author. Then you should give coefficient alpha *for each scale* (so if the measure has 10 scales, you need to report 10 coefficient alphas) based on your study!

3) **Procedure**: What was the methods for collecting the data. Try to describe it so that someone else could do the study if you weren't there. (e.g., Following IRB approval, students were allowed to sign up to participate in the study. Study sessions were run in groups of 4. Upon arriving to the lab participants completed a consent form. After providing consent, participants filled out a demographic form and completed a series of self-report measures. They then completed the narrative based task. This task involved looking at a series of four pictures depicting couples in relationships. They were then instructed to write a brief story to each picture about what was going on in the picture. Following this task they completed three additional self-report measures, and completed a the perceived quality of relationship components scale. They were then debriefed. Following collection of all of the data, three blind coders trained in techniques for rating narrative data rated each story for attachment security. When all stories were rated, data was entered into SPSS for data analysis.

Results

Here you will review your results.

1) **Descriptive data**: Everyone should start with the descriptive data. Report the mean (and SD) for all scales in the study. If you have more than one group, it is common to report this data at the group level (i.e. means and SDs for group A and group B).

2) **Hypothesis tests**: Unlike an article it is rare to do a data analytic section for a poster. Thus, you should state the hypothesis your testing and the statistic you are using. Then give the result. (e.g., to

examine if attachment security was related to perceived relationship quality, we conducted a series of Pearson correlations. As can be seen in Table 2, there was a significant correlation between attachment security scores from the narrative task and self-report ratings for relationship commitment ($r = 0.67, p < 0.01$), relationship satisfaction ($r = 0.59, p < 0.01$), and relationship passion ($r = 0.43, p < 0.05$).

3) Additional or Exploratory Analyses: Though you should always describe your hypothesis tests first, if there is room, feel free to conduct some exploratory analyses and include them! This is a VERY good idea when you find something you did not expect to find or if you found an interaction or a moderating variable or anything like that!

Discussion

Just like the introduction, you should do the discussion in bullet points (but they can be little bit longer here).

You should do a minimum of 1 bullet for each hypothesis. What did you find? What might it mean? How does it related to previous literature? (e.g., As expected, a positive relationship between attachment security and perceived relationship quality was found. This is consistent with prior research that has measured attachment security using self-report measures (e.g., Siefert, Haggerty, & Blake, 2011). Further, by assessing attachment security using a narrative based task, the present study suggests that the results of prior studies are unlikely to be due to self-report bias alone.

Feel free to use multiple bullets. Also, sometimes you may not talk about the unique contribution of your study until you've reviewed all the hypotheses. In this case, the unique contribution would get its own bullet. This is likely to occur if you have done a study on a unique population. For example: As predicted the present data indicate that the factor structure for the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Scale differed between White/Caucasian and African-American young adults. This extends prior research by suggesting that the scale may work differently in different cultures.

You should do at least 2 bullets on limitations: State how the study is limited and/or how the findings are limited. For example: "Though this data is consistent with prior research on attachment security and perceived relationship quality, it is important to note the limitations of the study. First, this study used a sample of young adult college students who were not married at the time of the study. It is unclear how well findings will generalize to other populations (e.g., older adults; young adults who are not in college; adults who are married). In addition, all data was collected at the same time. It is possible that the completion of the self-report measures immediately prior to completing the narrative task influenced the manner in which participants approached the task.

You should do at least 1 bullet on future directions: What should be done to further examine this area of research and/or what could be done to address the present studies limitations. For example: Future investigators may choose to build on this study by using a sample of older married adults. In addition, future investigators may wish to assess perceived relationship quality as multiple time points to see if attachment security scores based on narrative data is predictive of changes in relationship satisfaction over time.

References:

APA 6th edition style please 😊