

|| MARCH 2011

|| NEWS

|| FEATURES

Carol Greider Roundtable

The Science of Cooking

Making a Poster

Understanding Evolution

|| DEPARTMENTS

feature

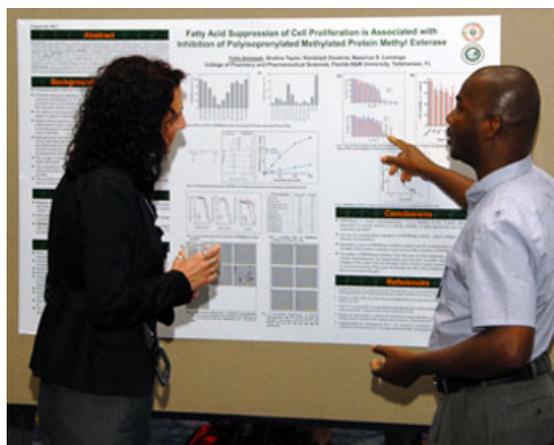
The ABCs of poster making



BY MARINA PAZIN

Whether you're attending the ASBMB annual meeting in April or making a poster for a departmental retreat, you're sure to find these tips useful.

As scientists, we spend much of our time formulating hypotheses about questions that haven't yet been answered, designing and conducting experiments to test if our initial predictions about the outcome are accurate, and then again developing new educated guesses based on accomplished work. Yet this work hardly ever is done alone. Underlying all the work a researcher conducts is a constant stream of communication. To formulate the original hypothesis and to determine what needs to be addressed, we read journal articles. While designing and conducting experiments, we seek feedback from lab members and collaborators. When adequate data has been collected, we proudly present it at symposia and conferences as posters and talks and, finally, in print.



Although you may be tempted to put all your research on the poster, include only the work pertaining to the title of the poster. You can discuss your other findings with your audience in person if they are interested in learning more about your research.

Even though it may seem otherwise, putting together an effective poster and delivering its content to the audience is no easy feat. Everything from the poster's layout to the font size and colors you use to represent your data must be carefully thought out. Although a variety of software can be used to make posters, generally PowerPoint is used because it is both Mac and PC friendly, and most researchers are familiar with it, making the work of summarizing results on a poster just that much easier.

Although you will find many different poster layouts at a conference, generally they all conform to the following basic format. They have a title, centered on the poster, which, in a single sentence, serves to summarize the findings. Though sometimes it appears in ALL CAPS or Title Case, the title is more legible when written as any other sentence, with only the first letter capitalized. To make the title stand out from the remaining content on your poster, enhance the size, set the font to bold and consider using a different color from the body text. Below the title are the author names and affiliations. These too are centered across the upper panel of the poster.

The left column: introduction and methods

Below the title, author and affiliation headings, the content of a standard scientific poster generally is laid out in three-column format. The column on the left generally contains the introduction, which

recaps the background information about your project. Better presented in bullet format rather than a single paragraph, the introduction summarizes relevant previous findings (whether by your research team or others) as well as the questions raised by these findings that you ultimately addressed. If at all possible, it is best to present this information as a diagram to make it easier for the reader to grasp the significance of your work as quickly as possible. (Remember that depending on the conference, there may be hundreds of posters on different topics displayed at any given time, so you want to do everything within your power to help your readers understand the significance of your work in an efficient manner.)

Although usually your project's abstract appears in the meeting guide, some organizers require a copy of the abstract also to appear on the poster. In this case, the abstract section of the poster replaces the introduction.

The left column also should clearly state (preferably in a single sentence) the hypothesis underlying your work and describe, under a Materials and Methods section, how the hypothesis was tested. Avoid being too wordy and again, especially if new technology is being used to address the question, try to include a graphic.

The center column: figures

The central panel of the poster generally displays figures representing the findings of your work and the corresponding figure legends. Several things should be kept in mind when putting this section of the presentation together. First, although it is good to be creative and color readily draws the attention of the reader, be careful when selecting colors to represent your data (e.g., on a chart or in a graph). It is estimated that in the U.S., nearly 8 percent of men and nearly 0.5 percent of women are color blind. Therefore, it is better to use different symbols, all in black, to distinguish among different groups on a graph rather than using different colors. If you are tempted to use color, however, avoid using red, green, blue and yellow.

If you show the same data (i.e., treatment type) on multiple graphs or charts, keep its representation (symbol and/or color) consistent from one figure to the next. Again, this serves to help your reader understand your findings in the least time-consuming manner.

The legends below each figure should summarize the finding depicted by the figure in a single sentence and explain, if appropriate, whether statistical significance between the various groups compared has been attained. Although you may be tempted to present all of your work on the poster, include only the work most relevant to the title of the poster. You can discuss your other findings with your audience in person if they are interested in learning more about your research.

The right column: conclusion

The last column is used to summarize the findings of the presented work under a Conclusion heading and to address its significance and any future work you may conduct based on the questions you already have addressed. Remember also to thank everyone who helped you under the Acknowledgment heading. This also is the place to include information about the agency funding your work and to whom the funding was issued.

Remember that a poster should speak clearly and concisely about your work, so it likely will take several attempts and drafts for you to design a poster that does it right. However, seeing audiences engrossed by your work at a conference should serve as a reminder that the effort you put into your poster is well worth the satisfaction you'll feel as a reward.

Marina Pazin (marinapazin@gmail.com) is a doctoral candidate at Northwestern University.

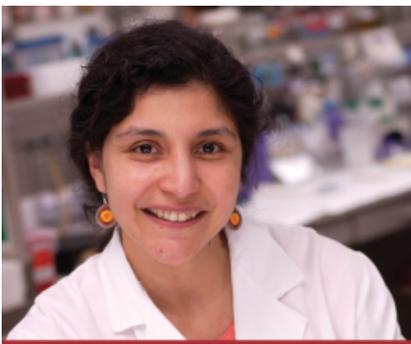
More from the current issue

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

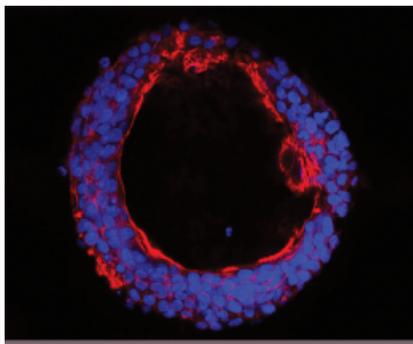
Not an end, but a beginning

NEWS FROM THE HILL

The appropriations outlook



Mentors guided a career that now aims at a cure



A sugar-attaching enzyme defines

ESSAY

Biochemist becomes a climate activist

LIPID NEWS

A potential target for sickle cell

JOURNAL NEWS

Real-time proteomics to speed surgery

SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT 

WILD TYPES

an ASBMB Today blog



 **ENGAGE**
an ASBMB TODAY initiative


American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

© COPYRIGHT AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY
11200 Rockville Pike, Suite 302, Rockville, MD 20852
240-283-6614 | asbmbtoday@asbmb.org

ABOUT
ASBMB TODAY