

## Book review

### Academic & Scientific Poster Presentation: a modern comprehensive guide

Nicholas Rowe; <http://www.springer.com/cn/book/9783319612782>; ISBN 978-3-319-61278-2



In this book Rowe examines the effectiveness of conference poster presentations as a form of science communication, and how to increase their impact. Over 13 chapters Rowe compiles research and resources from a range of sources to critique the medium, highlighting strengths and limitations, questioning whether posters are used as effectively as possible, and proposes ways to enhance the impact of the format.

The first chapter sets the scene of poster activity at around twice that of journal articles, which Rowe estimates to be almost 4.5m posters a year. A later chapter compares the first recorded example of an international poster session; the 1969 Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS), which hosted 105 posters over 4 days, to the 2014 FEBS-EMBO conference (FEBS EMBO 2014) featuring 2098 posters over 4 days – an increase from 26 to 525 per day. What started as an effective means of bringing new research to an interested audience has become diluted. The power of the poster remains as an interactive medium, which Rowe says is ideal as a means to “stimulate dialogue between the viewer and the presenter, which is a key aim of both conference attendance and poster presentation”.

The second chapter provides an interesting narrative and commentary of viewing posters; the physical organisation and structure of the poster hall, spacing between each poster, the range at which a viewer can begin to distinguish contrasting elements of each poster, and how they might be selecting which to view. We are given some insights into the thought processes of the presenter, as the viewer approaches, and ways to consider engaging with them. This chapter features some nice figures to illustrate these ideas.

Chapter 4 includes an interesting analogy between conference attendance and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Rowe suggests that having a poster at a conference may address esteem, but the top level of Actualisation is missing if there is no interaction and delegates and presenter do not engage and consolidate the potential for additional knowledge exchange.

In chapter 5, Rowe creates an interesting table of nine “constraining factors of current poster practice”. For example, on the Present Information measure he suggests posters are limited as a stand-alone medium. Without the presenter on hand to discuss the details, they fail to convey

sufficient information by themselves, impacting areas such as Dissemination, where posters are rarely available after an event, and are even less frequently accompanied by the same kind of information which the author can provide in person.

A group of four chapters provide highly practical insights into designing posters in a way which presents the information the author needs it to, and catches the attention of viewers who would be interested, looking at fonts, orientation, story-boarding, colour palettes and tone matching, effective illustrations, and many more valuable details. Rowe states that it is quite feasible for posters to have in the region of 1000 words of text, without being “text-heavy”, leading into an interesting comment about modern literacy, and what comprehension of ideas and content presentation is: transformation from an “Old Visual Literacy” which was dominated by writing to a “New Visual Literacy” that is a complex mixture of images, text, and other media. There is also a chapter on delivering the presentation. Rowe says it is untrue that poster presenting is a ‘junior’ activity, that poster questions and comments are unpredictable, and one of the more challenging forms of public speaking. He suggests honing techniques such as flash talks and elevator pitches, and planning the research story – how it began, who was involved, how it developed, what was exciting, and so on.

The closing chapters consider ways to move the format forward, mentioning SlideShare and the poster section of F1000 Research as platforms to showcase poster work.

This book will provoke thoughts and inspire enthusiasm in anyone involved in poster presentations, as well as giving some very practical advice to any future poster designers. Throughout the book, Rowe repeats the foundational strength of the poster as an effective networking and communication tool, countering this with a range of well-considered limiting factors. Rowe has a very cyclic style of writing, repeating concepts and evidence across chapters, perhaps a little too frequently for such a short book, however, this does help reinforce his critical core messages. It is clear that Rowe is passionate about realising a bigger future for the (not actually) humble poster, leaving the reader with the motivation and inspiration to join him in furthering the scope of impact for the medium.

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