

Recommendations to Students Entering the SSAR Poster Competition

The SSAR Poster Award was presented for the first time at the 2011 Joint Meeting. The SSAR Board of Directors wishes to recognize that poster presentations are an important part of the annual Joint Meeting event and that they are a valuable component of the graduate and undergraduate experience. The presentation of some research projects is better suited to a poster session, which allows much greater communication between the presenter and the audience. The following recommendations are intended to aid students in improving the quality of their poster presentations. The criteria presented below are applicable to any poster given at a scientific meeting.

Preparing the Presentation

A. The Poster Itself

- More so than an oral presentation, a poster needs to visually draw in the audience. When hundreds of posters are up at the same time, one's poster needs to stand out to be noticed.
- Put the poster up as early as is allowed by the conference center. That way you will have as many viewers as possible.
- Organization is key—a cluttered poster that is hard to read will not keep the attention of the audience.
- Use large fonts: at least 28–36 size font for the smallest words; approximately 90 size for the title.
- Use *sans serif* fonts such as Arial, Helvetica, and Calibri, which are easy to read from a distance.
- Use as many figures as possible, including graphs and photographs, to display your data.
- Use color to your advantage, but do not make it overwhelming. No one wants to look at a black-and-white poster, but too much color can be distracting.
- Do not include paragraphs on your poster (no one wants to stand there and read them). Bullet points or short sentences are much easier to read.

B. Oral Presentation

- Prepare a short explanation to your poster so that viewers do not have to read everything.
- Anticipate questions that the audience might have.
- Be prepared to discuss further research that you may later perform based on the results from the project about which you are presenting.
- Remember that other scientists have stopped at your poster because they are interested in your research. Relax and enjoy the experience of “talking shop” with other scientists who have similar interests.

Describing your Research

A. Design

- Present your research in a larger context by addressing previous studies (choose 1 or 2 to make your point). Relate your data to the knowledge of your field.
- Clearly state your hypothesis(es) and/or objectives up front.
- Flag techniques that are original to your study (i.e., this study is the first to address this question or to use this technique).

B. Summary of Results

- Present your results clearly. Tables with N and P values are fine (but not necessary) if they are readable. Always indicate your sample sizes.
- Indicate the importance of your results. How do they relate to previous studies? Biology in general?

C. Importance of Study

- An abstract, summary, or conclusions section of your poster is helpful in tying together many results.
- State the importance of your study and how your research has added to knowledge of the subject presented. Are your results generally applicable to larger biological questions?