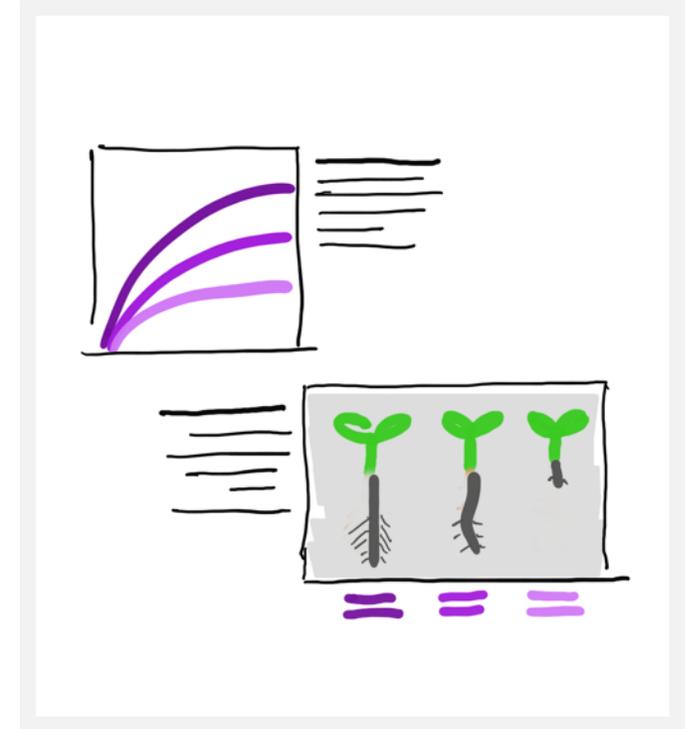
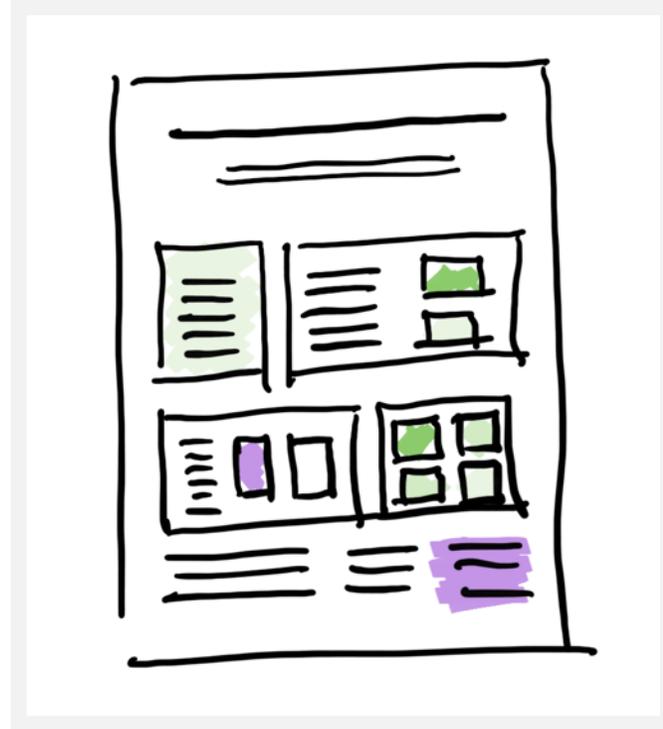
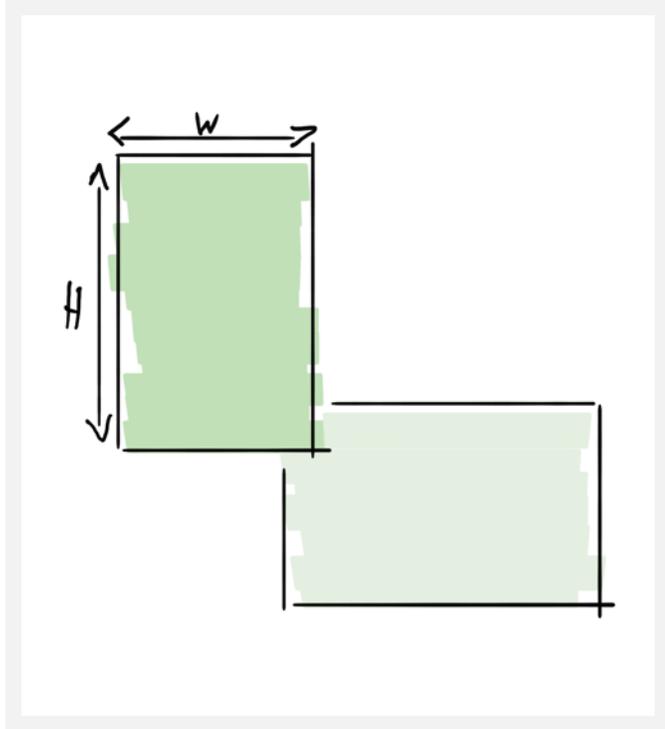


Your abstract has been selected
for a poster presentation
at a conference

... Now what?

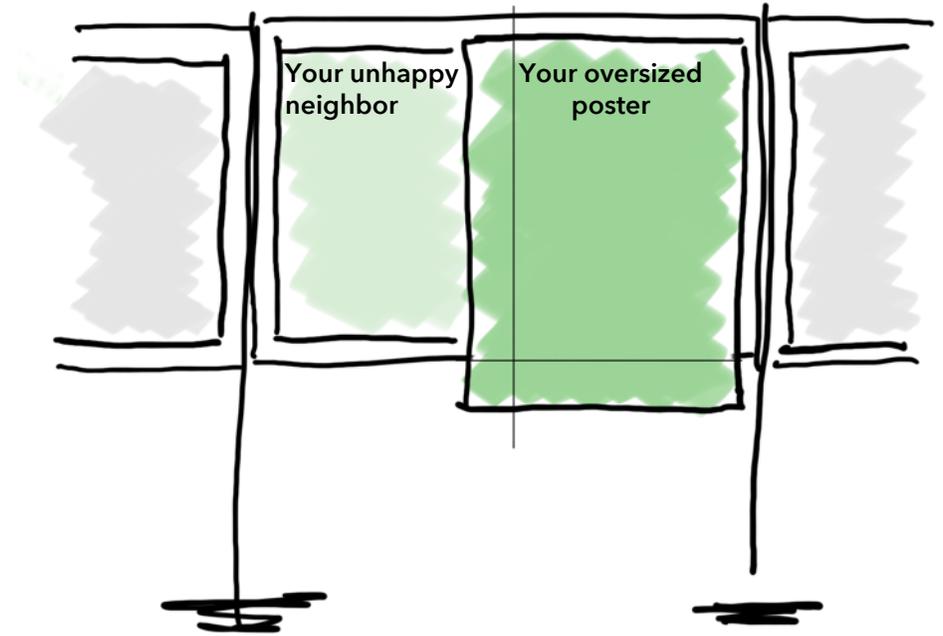
If this is your first conference attendance, or if you need inspiration
to design a poster, this 'primer' may be just what you need

Designing a poster requires a few considerations that pertain to **Technicalities, Layout** and **Contents**



Technicalities

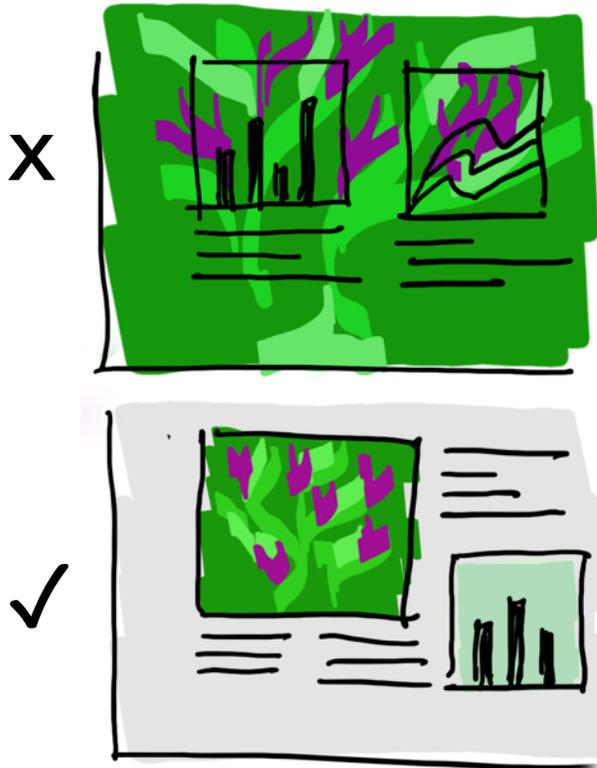
- The **size** of your poster has to respect the maximum dimensions specified by the conference organizer. These depend on the size of the poster boards. Your poster can always be smaller than the allotted space but should never be wider. Height is less critical since the worst that can happen is that the lower end of the poster pends freely at the bottom of the poster board (not great, but not a disaster). Width is critical since you don't want to encroach on your neighbor's space.
- The second technicality is the **material** for printing. Nowadays, you have the choice between different qualities of paper and cloth. The cloth option is fabulous for transport as it folds to fit in your suitcase. However, if your poster features high quality micrographs, you may want to consider paper as colors appear more brilliant. Matte or semi-gloss paper works better than high-gloss paper to avoid light reflecting off the poster.



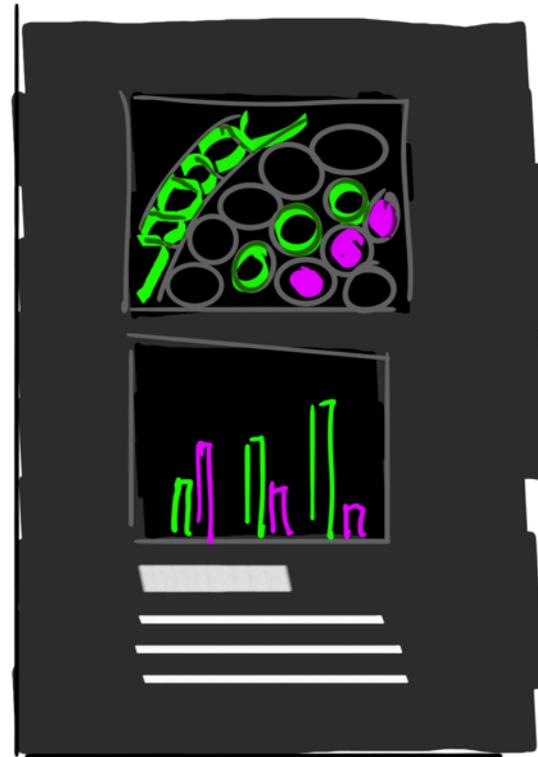
Professional printing of a poster has a price, but it is worth it (and is negligible compared to the cost of your conference attendance). Printing your poster on letter sized sheets looks very 'last minute' and doesn't give you much flexibility in terms of design.

Layout - Display Matters

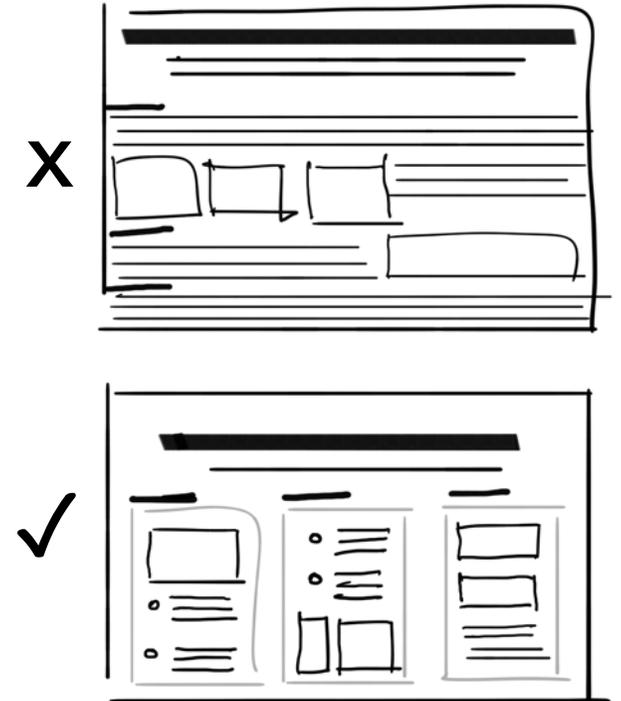
- It is tempting to use an image as a background, but this usually creates contrast problems and distracts from the contents. Use eye-catching foreground visuals instead. Don't be afraid to scale up your most important or dramatic figure and place it centrally.



- A white or light-colored monotone background always works, but if you show lots of fluorescence micrographs, a dark background might be more attractive as it lets the colors appear more bright. This requires a white or very light colored font for text.

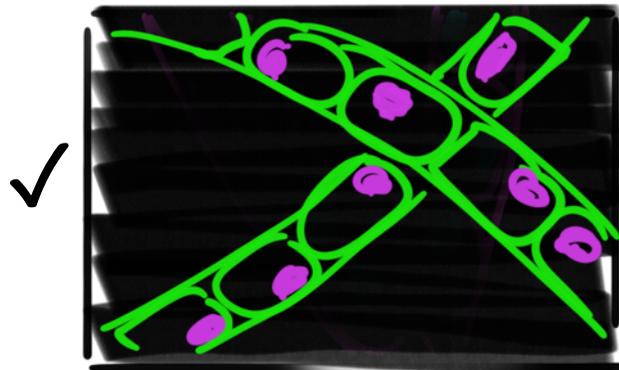
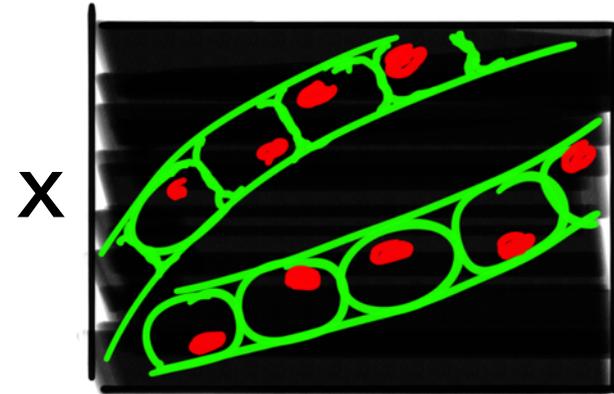
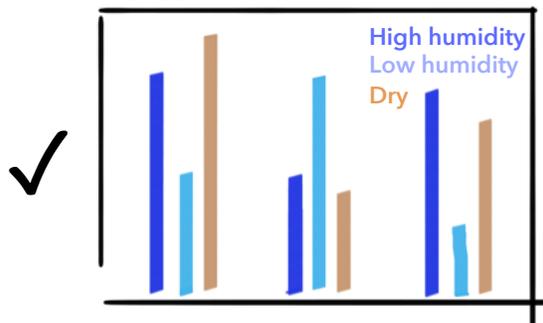
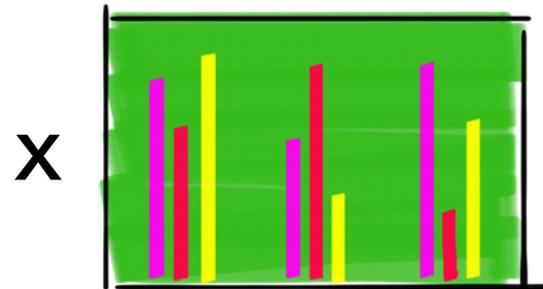


- Simple rectangular frames or subtly colored rectangles can help to structure your poster.
- Don't overcrowd the poster. Some blank space around sections is visually pleasant.
- Limit the width of text columns and align text items with each other and/or with figures.



Layout - For a Polished Look

- Don't exaggerate the use of color in your graphics or text.
- Some color combinations work others don't. If you are color blind, ask a friend to help.
- Make use of colors to create logical links between figures and to facilitate intuitive interpretation.
- Fluorescence micrographs should use false colors that can be distinguished by those who are color blind. Red-green is impossible to distinguish for 5% of the population!



- Use a font size that can be read from 1.5 m (4 ft) distance. Display your poster on your computer screen at 100% size and check whether you can read everything from that distance.
- Use different font sizes to create a hierarchy for normal text, subheadings and headings.
- Use at most two types of font.

Heading

Subheading

Normal style for short paragraphs and bullet points with occasional **bold font** for emphasis.

- Bullet points allow synthesizing information
- Make sure to space them for easier reading
- Color in the text can help to refer to **graphics** or **sample treatment**
- If you use **flashy colors**, do so sparingly and only for emphasis

Concept & Contents

A poster is a visual support for your short presentations that you will give to individual conference attendees. The poster should be self-explanatory for those reading it in your absence, but its main function is that of a graphical abstract supporting your oral 'pitch'.

This means that your poster is neither a manuscript (and hence doesn't necessarily provide the same detail of information), nor will it be read by people sitting in comfy armchairs. Instead it has to attract conference participants strolling by.

Your poster needs to catch the casual viewer's eye within a second or two!

- Structure your poster clearly so that the **objective and/or hypothesis**, as well as the **conclusion** or **main finding** can be found easily. Use bigger font for these items.
- Use **informative subheadings** rather than generic ones (e.g. 'Gravity is a directional cue for plant morphogenesis' rather than 'Introduction' as heading for your introductory section).
- Avoid long blocks of text. **Bullet points** are your best friends!
- Use **graphics and images** instead of wordy text to explain concepts. This applies even to the introductory section! Consider using flow charts to explain methods.
- Use plenty of **attractive visuals** to illustrate your data.



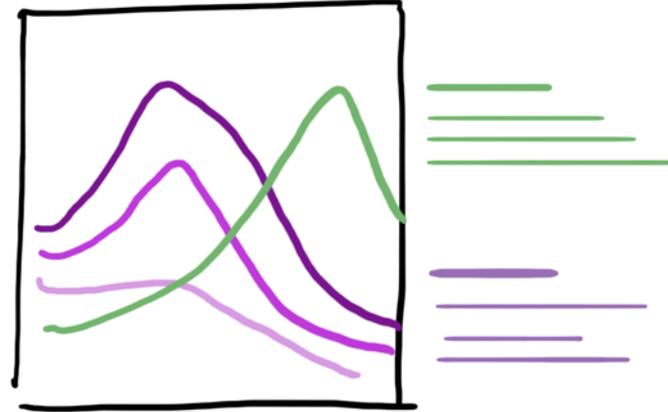
Concept & Contents

Try exploiting the format of a poster which gives you more freedom than a journal manuscript.

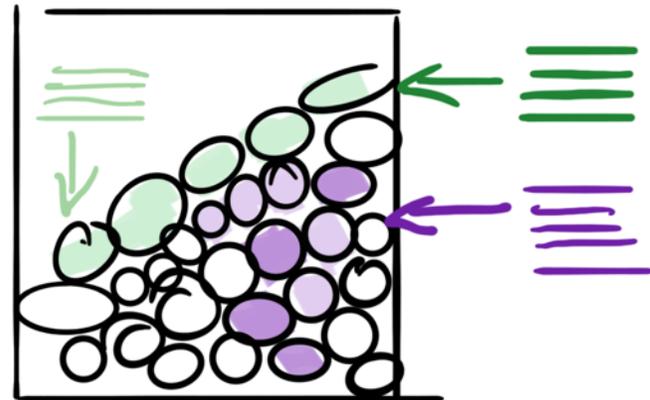
- Each individual result/graph/figure should have a heading and a very short explanation that summarizes the outcome/message. Don't use the same long figure legends that are typical for journal papers. And definitely don't use one big legend for multiple figures.
- Figures on posters offer more opportunities for creativity than papers. For example, use arrows to point at things. Use a color code to create a logic or links between different data points and their corresponding text explanation.

Tip: Don't waste space by placing the abstract on the poster. It is available in the program book.

Summarizing subheading here



Another subheading here



Short summary and interpretation of the data here. Unlike in a conventional paper (where Results and Discussion should be in separate sections) you can discuss and interpret data next to the figure.

Concept & Contents: Check list

Required elements

- Title
- Authors
- Affiliation(s) & Institutional logo
- Introduction / Context / Background
- Objective / Hypothesis / Research question
- Results (Figures & Short summaries)
- Conclusion(s)

Optional elements

- Methods: Whether or not you include information on methodology depends on how 'standard' the methods are to the participants at the conference. Information can be included in the Results section or may require a separate section.
- References: Rarely required unless you refer to other studies in the Introduction or Methods section.
- Acknowledgements, Funding information

Don't forget:

Contact information!

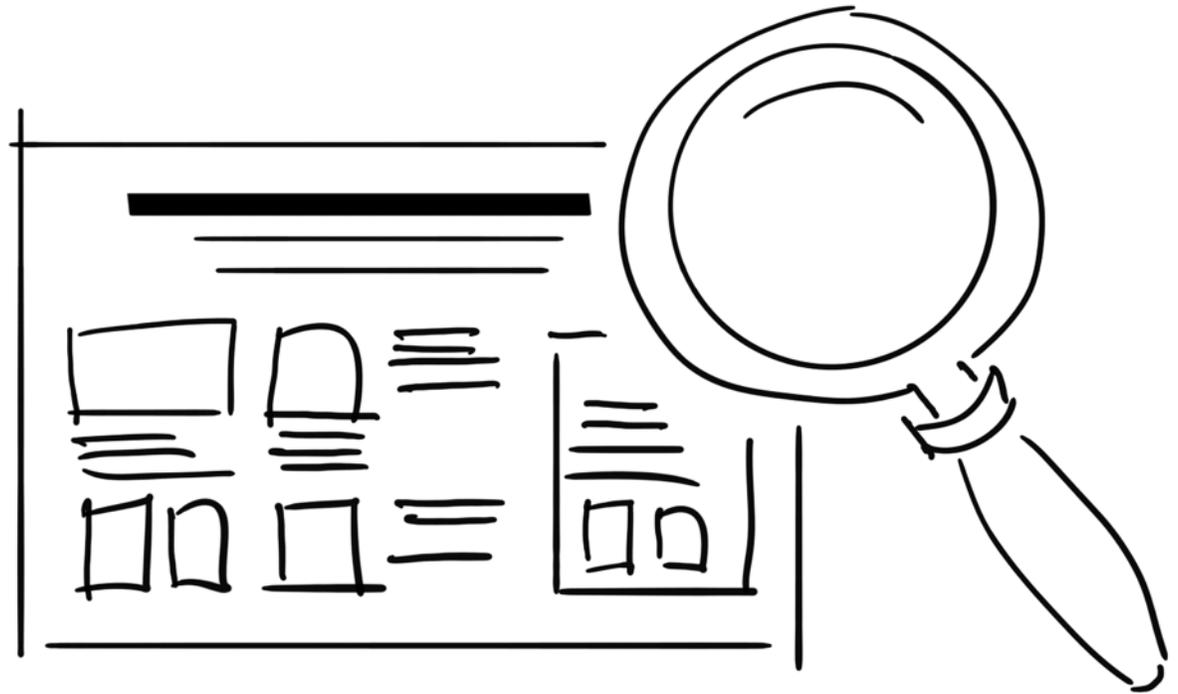
- Email
- Twitter handle?
- Lab web site?

Tips:

- Place your **portrait picture** on the poster. This allows those interested in talking with you to spot you in the crowd.
- Pin a small sleeve with your **business cards** next to the poster.
- Pin an envelope with letter sized **print-outs** of your poster to the board (check with your supervisor whether this kind of dissemination prior to publication is ok with them).
- Alternatively, display a **QR code** on the poster that links to a PDF of it stored in the cloud (e.g. Google Drive)

Before Sending the File to the Printer

- Display your poster on your computer screen and practice your 2-minute 'spiel' (see below). This allows you to test whether your poster displays all the items you need to support your story.
- Proofread the poster.
- Have someone else proofread the poster.
- Proofread the poster again. And again. On a reduced scale paper print-out.



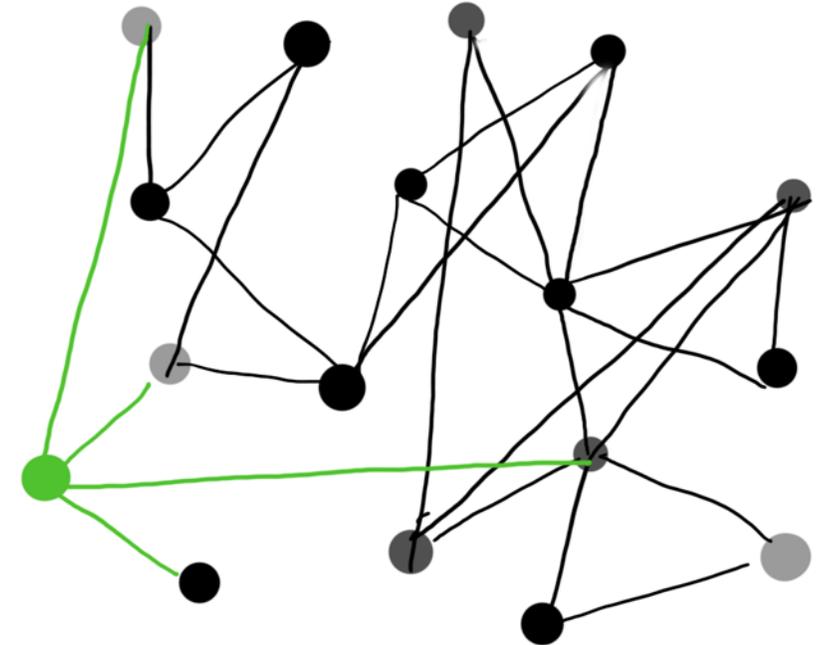
Why We Still Go to Conferences

The single most important function of a conference is **networking**. Because of online connectivity, most other functions of a conference (dissemination of research data, career development) could be done without burning kerosene or spending money on registration, accommodation and restaurants. Therefore, make it your mission to build your network during the conference!

Work toward targeted introductions and be open to serendipitous encounters.

Before you get to the conference, download the program or consult the conference app to prepare a **list of people you wish to talk to**. Even a short encounter with a PI will allow this person to remember you. This gives you an edge when you apply for a position in their lab in the future.

As important as the contact to senior PIs, are the **connections that you build with your peers**. If you stay in academia, these will be the people who become professional colleagues in the future. Many great collaborations started through connections initiated at grad school.



How to Network When It Doesn't Come Naturally

Networking is important, but how does one overcome one's inner shyness? Everyone else is talking to each other at the coffee break and you seem to be the only person who doesn't know anyone?

Believe me, we have all been there. Realize that most people at a conference are in the same situation. They came on their own and didn't know anyone else at the beginning of the meeting.

Wouldn't we all appreciate if someone came up to us, introduced themselves, and asked us what our research interests are?

All you need to do is be that person!

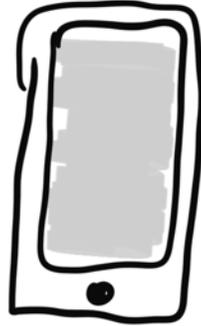


This is your reusable coffee tumbler that you brought to the conference to avoid wasting paper and styrofoam cups.

Make it your mission to introduce yourself to several new people each day of the conference - during coffee breaks, workshops and during the poster sessions!

Be Prepared

- Browse the abstracts in the conference app (if provided) or program book beforehand to identify the posters of interest. Check out these posters ahead of time, during breaks in the conference program. This allows you to triage which posters you must not miss during poster session.



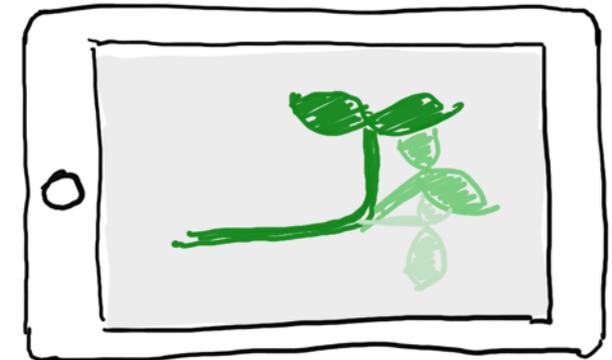
- Prepare business cards with your affiliation and email address. Self-designed and printed on the home printer is entirely fine.
- If your supervisor agrees, print letter-sized, black-and-white hardcopies of your poster for people to grab.



- Prepare a 2-minute short 'spiel' of your poster. In this short time, it is impossible to recount the entire poster. Focus on the objective, the big lines, the main result and the conclusion.



- Prepare videos or other additional material on your laptop or tablet and have these with you during the poster session for those who are interested in learning all the details of your project.



Poster Etiquette

By default, you should assume that the data presented on a poster at any conference are unpublished. Generally, it is therefore strictly forbidden to take photographs of any posters, unless the respective author gives explicit consent.

At some conferences you can pick up stickers to indicate directly on the poster whether or not anyone is allowed to take pictures of your poster. Alternatively, place these symbols on your poster file.



Independently, you can also indicate whether you are happy for other participants to tweet about your poster or otherwise mention it in social media.



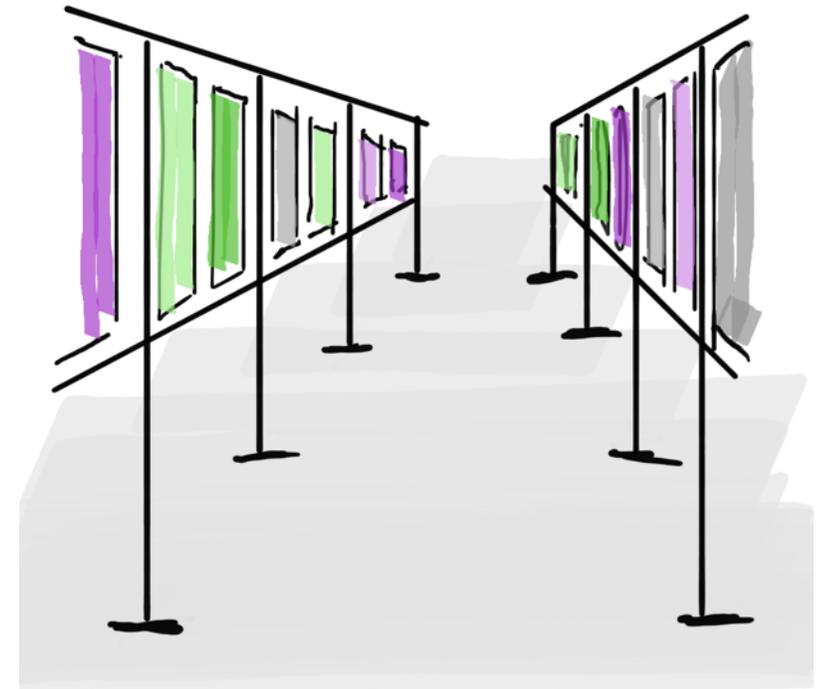
Consult with your supervisor about these options.

During the Poster Session

- At the time you are assigned to be next to your poster, you should do so. Of course, this prevents you from meeting with poster presenters in the same session. Try to meet up with the authors at other times: Either contact them by email or through the conference app.
- When someone approaches your poster, offer to give them a tour of the poster. Do not immediately elaborate on all the details of your study. Provide a 2-minute overview to start with.
- To tailor your presentation, ask your interlocutor what interests them in the project (could be the results, or simply the methodology) and/or what their background is. This allows you to gauge which terms you may have to explain, and on which elements to spend more time.
- During your 2-minute 'spiel', gauge whether the person is interested in hearing more about your project. If that seems to be the case, return to the figures that you didn't explain in detail and provide additional information.

Optimize your time

Although you should be near your poster during the assigned time, use moments of low traffic to look at posters nearby. If you keep an eye on your own poster, you can return to it when you see someone studying it.



Anja Geitmann



Anja Geitmann is professor and dean at McGill University, Montreal, Canada. She studies plant development and reproduction using biomechanical approaches. She holds the Canada Research Chair in Biomechanics of Plant Development and leads an interdisciplinary team of biologists and engineers.

In 2013-2015 she served as President of the Microscopical Society of Canada and she was the President of the Canadian Society of Plant Biologists in 2015-2017. She is the President of the International Association of Plant Reproduction Research and she serves on the editorial boards of multiple scientific journals including *Plant Physiology*.

Dr. Geitmann has organized international conferences and chaired workshops and symposia. She has given countless conference presentations, both talks and posters. For many years, while faculty member at *Université de Montréal*, she taught the course 'Scientific Communication' to honors and graduate students. For her, the key to communicating science is telling a compelling story.