A Guide to Presenting a Poster

Preparing to Present

Making the physical poster is only part of preparing for a poster session. You MUST practice also. Interacting with the audience demands thinking on your feet, applying your social skills, and drawing on short, concise explanations without fumbling or mumbling.

- Practice 2, 5, and 10-minute versions of your poster presentation.

- Make sure you can sum up your poster's key points and conclusions in 2-3 sentences.

- Practice starting your spiel from different sections of your poster.

- Think about which parts of your poster will be the most challenging to explain.

- Anticipate people's questions and how you will answer them.

- Produce supplemental handouts and/or photocopies of publications related to the work described in your poster. Don't substitute a handout for a good oral explanation--the handout is a "take away" piece for reinforcing your message.

Presenting Your Talk
- **Greet people with a smile and show your enthusiasm** for your work.

- **Find out why they are interested in your poster BEFORE you launch into your spie**l so that you are able to address their needs and expectations.

- **Do not stand in front of your poster** where you might block people's view. Stand to the side or turn sideways at the side of the poster without blocking the adjacent poster.

- **Maintain eye contact with people as you present your poster**. Do not read directly from your poster or from a prepared script. Reading signals "lack of knowledge" to the audience.

- **Use hand gestures to illustrate and reinforce key concepts and relationships**. As you talk through your poster, use a pointer or your hands to refer to particular parts of the poster so that people can follow your talk. Do not put your hands in your pockets or behind your back

- **Spend extra time explaining the figures and tables** on your poster.

The Cain Project in Engineering and Professional Communication

CAIN PROJECT

- **Summarize each section of the poster** before moving on to the next section. For example, "Now that I've described the need to XXX, I'd like to explain the process we developed to do it."

- If people approach your poster after you have begun your spiel, **pause to welcome them** and identify where you are in the spiel, "Hi, I'm in the middle of explaining the methods we used to characterize the XXX protein."

- **Check your audience's understanding** of the more complex concepts presented in your poster by paying attention to non-verbal cues or by asking them whether YOU have been clear or should go into a little more detail. DO NOT ask whether THEY understand what you've said.

  For example, say, "Should I say a little more about how the algorithm operates?" "Have I been complete enough?" or "Would you like me to go over any of the parts again?"

  DO NOT SAY "Do you understand how this works?" or "Do you get this?" Such questions seem to blame the audience or seem designed to reveal their ignorance.

- **Maintain your professionalism.** Thank people for listening and talking with you about your project: "Thanks for stopping to talk with me." "Thanks for your feedback on the XXX mechanism." Make your comment show YOU WERE LISTENING TO THEM, not just talking at them. (Don't use a cliché such as "thank you for your time," and don't apologize, either). Remember that the people attending the poster session may be future your employers or research collaborators.