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# UW-L ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF STUDENT RESEARCH & CREATIVITY *PRESENTATION GUIDELINES*

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## INTRODUCTION

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For many of you, the presentation you make at the Celebration of Student Research and Creativity will be one of your first “professional” presentations. These guidelines will give you some specific details about the format your oral or poster presentation should take at the UW-L Celebration, as well as some general ideas to think about in preparing presentation of your work.

The main guiding principle to follow in preparing your presentation, and in writing your final written report for the UW-L Undergraduate Research Program, is simply to follow the standard seminar/exhibit/poster format that is commonly used at professional meetings within your field. Consult your faculty mentor for assistance. While there may always be certain situation-specific requirements to follow, if you abide by the standards prevalent in your field of study, you will likely not go wrong.

The primary difference between **poster** and **oral** presentations is that you should try to let a poster do most of the 'talking' for you. That is, the material presented in **poster** form should convey the essence of your message. Your task as a poster presenter is to answer questions and provide further details and to convince others that what you have done is excellent and worthwhile to do this you have to 'stand-by-your-poster!' A poster is simply a static, visual medium that you use to communicate ideas and messages.

With an **oral** presentation, you have more control over what your audience can focus on. As you proceed through an oral presentation, you can tell a story and lead your listeners along particular paths of reasoning and thought. With posters, your audience is free to key in on specific points that they may be particularly interested in, and they will have more time to do this.

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## ORAL PRESENTATIONS

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### I. Time

Oral presentations will be **25 minutes** long. You should reserve approximately five minutes of this period for audience questions at the end of your talk.

### II. Format

You have to present certain pieces of information, as detailed in the General Presentation Guidelines/Format below on page 2. You will have approximately 15 minutes to deliver your presentation orally. Spend some time planning your presentation using the General Guidelines. This will help match the presentation to the time allotted.

Power Point<sup>®</sup>-based presentations may be used. A table/podium and an IBM PC notebook with projection monitor for Power Point presentations will be available.

It is required that all PowerPoint or other computer files be loaded the evening before the Celebration. If you are unable to load your presentation at the assigned time, please arrange for someone else to bring it by (flash drive is easiest) and load it for you.

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## POSTER PRESENTATIONS

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### I. Space

At the UW-L Celebration of Student Research and Creativity you are allowed a space of 4 feet high by 4 feet wide. Remember that you are presenting your poster at a conference with many others, so you will have limited space. The space you are allowed will restrict the content of your poster.

### II. Format

Unlike oral presentations, where speakers may be able to divert attention from a poorly planned presentation, with posters, poor planning is there for all to see. In the general format section below, the specific elements that any presentation should include are listed. Refer to these as you plan your poster.

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## GENERAL PRESENTATION GUIDELINES

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### I. General Format

All presentations (oral and poster) will generally contain the elements listed below. The main difference between the two forms is that abstracts are often included in a poster, but not in an oral presentation. For most professional conferences, you will need to submit an abstract complete with title and authors as part of the registration process. Most presentations will contain:

- **Abstract:** a summary of the project stating what you have set out to do, how you have done it, the key results, and the main findings and conclusions.
- **Title:** tells others the name of the project, the people involved in the work and their affiliation. The title should be large, descriptive, and concise.
- **Introduction:** should include clear statements about the problem that you are trying to solve, the new ideas or items you are trying to discover or create, or the proofs that you are trying to establish. You should note the background work that has led up to the current status of your research or creative work in this area. These should then lead to declarations of your specific project aims and objectives.
- **Theory or Methods:** explains the basis of the techniques that you are using or the procedures that you have adopted in your study. You should also state and justify any assumptions, so that your results can be viewed in the proper context.
- **Results:** shows illustrative examples of the main results/products of your work.
- **Conclusions:** discusses the main findings of your investigation and their value.
- **Further Plans:** contains your recommendations and thoughts about how the work could be continued. What kinds of things could be done next? What are possible long-term goals or outcomes?
- **Acknowledgments:** allows you to thank the organizations who might have given you money for your work and/or the individuals who donated their time to help you with your project.

## II. Planning

There are several stages in planning a presentation. These are outlined below.

### A. Gathering Information

First, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the objective of the investigation?
- Has someone done the work before?
- How have I gone about the study?
- Why did I follow this particular route of investigation?
- What are the principles governing the techniques that I am using?
- What assumptions did I make, and what were my justifications?
- What problems did I encounter, and what results did I obtain?
- Have I solved the problem, and what have I discovered?
- Are my analyses sound?

Although the above list of questions is by no means exhaustive, it gives you a start. Think about the **What**, **How**, and **Why** of the work that you have done. Critically examine the approach that you have taken and the results that you have obtained. Ideally, you should have done this throughout your project anyway. By revisiting these questions as you plan your presentation, you will have a clearer idea of the objectives and the contributions that you have, or have not, been able to make. You will know better the information you have at your disposal for presentation.

Such brainstorming often yields loads of responses. Jot your answers onto a BIG piece of paper, not necessarily in an ordered fashion. Note as many points as possible, so that you do not miss any important ideas. The ordering and pruning of the information will come later. From your list, note the common areas, topics, or pieces of information, and group them together. Use color or number coding, or circles and lines to help you identify and categorize the information. This activity should help you focus further on the content you can use with confidence. This may also be a good time to get some preliminary guidance and advice from your mentor!

### B. Determining Content

If you follow the above presentation format guidelines, then the content is more or less determined for you. However, given that you have limited space or time, you now have to decide between what is important and what is not essential. Your decision should be based on at least two factors, namely:

- **What are you trying to achieve by presenting?**

Is it to tell people what you have done? Is it to inform people of a new discovery? Is it to convince people that one idea or technique is better than another?

- **Who will be attending the presentation?**

Are they technical people? What is the level of their knowledge of your subject area? The answers to these questions will define the content to include and set the tone of the presentation.

## III. Design

An advertising billboard is a poster. If well designed, it will be attractive and engender a lasting impression--earnest but not boring. Importantly, it should shout out to you, "**buy me**", or you should think, "**I want that!**" Similarly, in using posters to convey technical information, they should be designed such that the reader thinks "**Yes!**" or "**I see!**" and then leave with the impression that he or she has learned something new. The same feelings should be conveyed in an oral presentation. You will want to clearly present your desired information in as effective a manner as possible. Ultimately, the design of your poster and oral presentations is a personal matter, and different individuals will have different views on how to best present certain information. Nevertheless, here are some general suggestions to guide you:

**A. Plan, plan, plan!** (see part II above)

**B. Keep the material simple**

- Make full use of your space (posters) or time (orals), but beware of information overload, as the results can often be messy and confusing!
- Be concise
- Use only pertinent information to convey your message.
- Be selective when showing results. Present only those that illustrate the main findings of the project; however, do keep other results handy so that you may refer to them when asked.

**C. Use colors sparingly and with taste**

- Use colors only to emphasize, differentiate, and to add interest. Do not use colors just to impress!
- Choose background and foreground color combinations that have high contrast and complement each other, *i.e.* black or dark blue on white or very light gray is good. It is better to keep the background light, as people are used to it (for example, newspapers and books).

**D. Do not use more than two font types**

- Too many font types can be distracting, especially when they appear in the same sentence.
- Titles and headings should appear larger than other text, but not too large. The text on a poster should be legible from a distance, say from 5 to 10 feet. For oral presentations, be sure that visuals will be easily seen from the back of the room.

**E. Do not use all UPPERCASE type in your posters** (Acceptable for HEADINGS)

- This can make the material difficult to read. Just compare the two sentences below:  
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF A LINE WHERE ALL THE CHARACTERS ARE IN UPPER CASE?  
What do you think of this line, where only the first character of the first word is in upper case?

**F. Do not use a different font to highlight important points**

- This can cause the fluency and flow of your sentence to appear disrupted. For example:  
In this sentence, I want to **emphasize** the word 'emphasize'.  
In this sentence, I want to emphasize the word 'emphasize'.  
  
• Use underlined text, **bold face**, *italics*, or **combinations** to emphasize words and phrases.  
• If you use **bold italicized print** for emphasis, then underlining is not necessary!

**G. Equations**

- Should be kept to a minimum. Present only the necessary and important equations.
- Should be large enough to read clearly.

- Should be accompanied by nomenclature and definitions to explain the significance of each variable.

## H. Pictures

- *Graphs:*
  - Choose graph types that are appropriate for the information that you want to display.
  - Annotations should be large enough, and the lines of line-graphs should be thick enough so that they may be viewed from a distance.
  - Instead of using lines of different thickness, use contrasting colored lines or different line styles to distinguish between different lines in multi-line graphs.
  - Multi-line plots or plots with more than one variable should have a legend relating the plotted variable to the color or style of the line.
- *Diagrams and drawings:*
  - Should be labeled.
  - Drawings and labels should be large and clear enough so that they are still legible from a distance.
- *Clipart:*
  - Should only be used if they add interest to the display and complement the subject matter. Otherwise, all they do is distract attention from the focus of the presentation.
  - Can also be 'dangerous,' as you may spend more time fiddling around with images and choosing appropriate cartoons than concentrating on the **content**.

## I. Check your spelling

Spelling mistakes give the impression that you have not put in the effort.

## J. Maintain a consistent style

- Inconsistent styles interrupt the fluency of your messages.
- Headings on the different pages of the poster should appear in the same position on all pages.
- Graphs should be of the same size, especially if they are to be compared.
- If bold lettering is used for emphasis on one page, then do not use italics on others.
- Position captions for graphs, drawings, and tables either at the top or at the bottom of the figure.

## K. Arrangement/ordering of presentation components should appear smooth

- Remember that you are telling a story about what you have done and achieved. As in report writing, the way you arrange the sections should follow the 'storyline.'
- Use a new page/slide to start off a new section.

## L. Review, review, review!!!

- Make draft versions of your poster sections or printouts of your slides and check them for:
  - Mistakes, legibility, inconsistencies in style, different layout arrangements
- Be critical of yourself and ask your friends, colleagues, or mentors for their honest, critical opinions.
- Have fun showing off your good work!!!