GRASSLAND SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

ANNUAL CONGRESS

Guidelines for Presentations

(Please also see abstract submission guidelines)

PLATFORM PRESENTATIONS

General

Oral presentations should be no longer than 15 minutes in length, unless the Steering Committee has otherwise specified (e.g. for Plenary Presentations). Each presentation has a 5 minute discussion period during the session during which questions may be answered. Presentations must be in Microsoft PowerPoint and should be handed in either at the registration desk or at the venue according to the timetable which will be on display.

An oral presentation goes past the audience only once, so it must be well organized, logically developed, stripped of details that divert the audience's attention from the essential points, and smoothly delivered. The goal of a presentation is to communicate why the research/project was undertaken, how it was done, and what was learnt. Communicate this clearly, succinctly and convincingly.

Preparing the Presentation:

1. **Presenting a paper isn't merely a case of paraphrasing it**. Certain parts need to be stripped down, while others need more "airtime". Usually, the methods section can be edited down to the bare bones – if people have questions about the methods, they will come out in the question session at the end. While methods are edited down, results should get more airtime.

2. **Start with providing background information**, drawing from the introduction, other studies, and even the discussion, if you need to, and then end the introduction section with a concise statement of the specific question or questions addressed.

3. **Present the study in sections if it is composed of a number of small experiments or investigations.** Draw conclusions from each section of the study, as you present them, to make the link between the finding and the conclusions stronger. You need to lead the audience from point to point. For example, if you tackled a number of experiments/studies in the paper, present each separately – i.e. first specific question, methods, key results, some discussion (and how it might have led you to pose the second question), and then onto the next question (question, methods, key results, discussion… etc.).

4. **Summarize the major findings** of the research at the end of the talk, taking care to make each point separately.

Making the Presentation:

1. **Practice makes not-so-nervous**. Most of us get nervous when giving a presentation. One study apparently found that people are more afraid of public speaking than death! One way to minimize your nerves is to practise your presentation. The more you have practised, the more you will be able to reassure yourself that you know what you are going to say and how you are going to say it.

2. **Don't rush**.

3. **Make your visual aids work for you**. Draw the audience's attention to, say, trends in the data, or even interesting things you might have captured on film. Visual aids are meant to facilitate your communication, not just make the audience stare at the screen, instead of you. Another point about making the visual aids work for you – if, when you need to, you are able to use the laser pointer without shaking too much, then by all means do so, it really helps to lead the audience to the point you're

trying to make. If you can't, rather refer to, say, "the lower line", or "the line in blue" or "graph on the left hand side"…

4. **Be clear on unfamiliar terms**: Make sure that unfamiliar terms that you use are presented in the visual aids. This is particularly true for abbreviations. For example, if you use "NDVIs" in your presentation, be sure to put what the abbreviation stands for up on the visual aids.

5. **Don't mumble, make eye contact** with the audience, and try to **sound interested** in what you're saying.

6. **Warn your audience that the end is near**. Slip in a phrase like, "One final point…" or, even, "In conclusion…", or just plain old "Finally,…"

7. **End your talk** by thanking the audience for their attention.

8. **Stick to the time limit.** Not doing so suggests you were unable to highlight the salient points of your research. It also is inconsiderate to the audience and the conference organizers.

9. **Handling questions:** If you have the presence of mind to do so, paraphrase a question before answering it to help those in the audience who may have not heard the question correctly. Also, don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to a question.

Visual Aids:

1. **Make sure visual aids are large enough** to be visible to the audience at the back of the room. Err on the side of caution if you have no idea how large the venue is going to be.

2. **Go for contrast –** a guideline is to use either light text on a dark background or vice versa. Be aware of colour-blind people (more common than one thinks) who often struggle to distinguish reds from greens and colours similar in tone.

3. **No RED!**! It is best to avoid using RED in graphics and text at all as it is difficult for most people to distinguish.

4. **Try to avoid too much text on slides**. It can be quite boring. If you must have text, try to introduce each point as you go along, otherwise the audience tends to read on ahead while you're still discussing the first point.

5. **The audience loves pictures and photographs**.

6. **Maps, etc**. all help make the point.

7. **Rework figures.** A figure presented in an oral presentation has to be instantly comprehensible. To facilitate this, enlarge the text labelling your axes. If you have two lines on a graph, make it clear which is which with clear labelling) (see example below). Even better, if you are a whiz with PowerPoint, introduce the lines onto the graph separately.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

General

Posters should be no larger than A0 (841 × 1189 mm), and preferably portrait in format. Adhesive will be provided either at the registration desk or at the poster display venue.

A4 copies of your poster for other delegates to take and keep helps to expose your research to a wider audience and get more feedback. Bring about 50 copies and place these at the base of your poster.

Poster presenters will be given a **3 minute** slot during the relevant session to give a brief summary of their poster in the form of a **PowerPoint presentation of between 3 to 5 slides**, with 2 minutes for questions, i.e. a total of 5 minutes. Presentations must be in Microsoft PowerPoint (the old version, 2003) and should be handed in either at the registration desk or at the venue according to the timetable which will be on display. Consult the platform guidelines for hints on good presentations.

Delegates in the Research Proposal session are not required to give a PowerPoint presentation.

Time for detailed discussion of posters is available during the general poster session and it is advisable to be nearby during tea breaks, so be sure to grab your refreshments and stand near your poster!

Posters are judged on their presentation as well as their content. They are supposed to be concise communication tools. They should attract attention and provoke curiosity. Remember, that the poster's audience often has distractions of noise and movement of other people.

A **good guideline for posters is that one should be able to read them in 3 minutes**. The best way to test this is to ask a friend to do this before you go to the expense of printing the poster.

The aim of posters is usually that they are presented with the author next to them. This means that a) a lot of detail is unnecessary, and b) you need to be prepared to answer questions and guide your audience through your poster.

So, how do you make an effective poster? The poster should be able to tell a passer-by what it is about at first glance. This is usually done using the title and supporting images. Make sure the information is properly arranged, that the poster is graphically appealing, and that data are clearly represented. Bear in mind that the clarity of the presentation stems from proper arrangement of information, and that to make the poster appealing, you need to keep the design of your poster simple.

Different people will read your poster with different levels of interest, based on their fields of interest and expertise. Many will only read the background and objectives and then move on to the conclusions. Others, with a deeper interest, might read the entire poster. To facilitate both these groups of people, make sure that the specific sections are clearly labeled and easy to find. It should also be possible to read the individual sections of your poster quickly – in other words, avoid large blocks of text. Also avoid long sentences.

1. **Don't say too much**. The temptation is always great to give as much detail as possible in presenting your work. This ultimately results in a poster with too much small text. Not only is this not visually appealing, it demands too much from the audience.

2. **Before you even start to think of design, plot the research story**. What details are needed to make your point, what is extraneous? Make sure the information flows logically. Plot the flow of information, first, on scrap paper, so that you know what you want to say and how.

3. **The information should follow a narrative**. Tell a story; use words, tables and graphics to lead the reader through the presentation.

4. **Effective posters can be *both* viewer-friendly and contain complex data.** The trick is using design cleverly to present these data. Posters may be simple, but shouldn't patronize the audience.

Tips towards "viewer-friendliness":

1. It often helps to state the conclusion of the investigation in the title.

2. Lettering for titles should be readable from at least 2m away.

3. Avoid abbreviations; if you do use them be sure to explain them on first use.

4. Heading should include authors' names and affiliations. A photo of the author(s) is very useful as it helps people who read the poster and want to know more to find you.

5. Text, tables and graphics should look integrated. The same typeface should be used throughout. Try to choose a "user friendly" typeface (i.e. one that is clear, not, say, Blackadder font).

6. Lettering for the body of the poster should be legible from 1.5m away.

7. Be careful with colour, avoid garish contrast.

8. Use figures and tables whenever possible to help illustrate your point.

9. Graphics tend to look better if they are wider than tall. Some put this at 50% wider than tall. Try to avoid elaborately coded shadings and cross-hatchings, try to rather use very definitely different colours, with clear patterning, if necessary. Bear in mind members of the audience who may be colour blind.

10. No RED!! It is best to avoid using RED in graphics and text at all as it is difficult for most people to distinguish.

11. Use explanations to explain diagrams and other graphics, wherever possible. You can place these explanations on the graphic – using callouts, if you are short of space.

Many thanks to the Arid Zone Ecology Forum (www.azef.co.za) for allowing us to use their excellent guidelines!

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