Poster presentations often serve as an initial step for presenting research or other practice-based information. When it is time to disseminate the poster content to a broader audience, preparing a manuscript for publication is often the next step. However, posters and manuscripts serve distinct purposes, target different audiences, and showcase content differently. The purposes of this article are to clarify how posters and publishable manuscripts differ and to discuss how to transform a poster presentation into a well-written manuscript.

It should be remembered that a poster is primarily a tool for presenting content visually using an abundance of data, pictures, and charts and a minimum of words. Viewers concentrate on those sections of the poster that most interest them. Because many topical areas are usually presented in a poster, viewers decide which components most appeal to them and focus their attention on those areas. Posters present all information at one time, permitting readers to determine their interest level, the content’s relevance to them, and how much time to spend on each poster. All of these actions can be done swiftly, efficiently, and with a “broad brush” view. Visual learners tend to favor poster presentations rather than journal articles. Typically, visual learners prefer diagrams and pictures, along with explanations of topics that can easily be understood and applied. Although they are extremely useful, posters may have weaknesses: they may have small text that is difficult to read, a limited visual appeal to attract viewers, a format that is too busy and crowded with information, or a poorly designed layout. In addition, it is difficult to present a complicated research study in a poster format because greater detail is required for proper comprehension.

Like posters, manuscripts have specific strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, because a manuscript has more space, more information can be presented. A manuscript allows readers to take more time to examine the content, whereas posters are often viewed for limited periods during a conference. On the negative side, readers may lose interest in a manuscript if nothing new is stated or if the content is not clearly presented or coherently organized. And although poster presenters are often present to interact with poster viewers at conferences, manuscripts don’t allow for a personal connection between the writer and readers. Figure 1 provides a brief overview of the essential differences between posters and manuscripts.

Assembling the Building Blocks
When transforming a poster into a manuscript, the author needs to be very clear about the specific purpose(s) of the manuscript and recognize that the content and organization of a poster and manuscript may differ tremendously. A manuscript, for example, may report on a research study and its applicability to practice, describe how an infectious disease program was developed and implemented in a long-term care setting, discuss essential evidence-based practices in the foot care of a diabetic patient, or suggest ways to provide culturally competent nursing care to diverse age, gender, racial, and ethnic groups.

When considering how the ideas presented in a poster can be reshaped into a manuscript, the author should take the following initial steps:

- In one sentence, clearly state the purpose of the manuscript, making certain that it fills a unique gap within the literature. Also, recognize that the purpose of the manuscript may not be the same as the poster’s purpose. Discussion during the poster presentation may have stimulated the authors to frame their project differently or to include additional ideas in the manuscript.

- Develop a succinct outline that describes the manuscript’s key points and applicability to knowledge development or practice.

- Determine whether there is enough information to expand the presentation beyond the poster format.

When the writer is clear about the manuscript’s focus, it is crucial to identify which journals may be interested in the topic. For some authors, it may also be important to determine whether the journals are peer reviewed; publication in a peer-reviewed journal can be essential for professional reviews and promotions in academic as well as in some clinical practice settings. After several journals have been identified, it is recommended that potential authors query the editor to determine whether there is an interest in the
manuscript. If the response is affirmative, then obtain the manuscript guidelines for that journal. In the case of *Rehabilitation Nursing*, articles are published in several categories: features (e.g., describing the development of a staff educational program, reporting the results of a research study), Current Issues, Clinical Consultation, Perspectives, Break Room, and Writers’ Contest. Each has its own focus, structure, and length; obtain the “Information for Authors” at rehabnurse.org.

Although a poster’s purpose is to concisely present information in a visual format, a manuscript must provide the reader with greater detail through the written word. When preparing a research-focused manuscript, for example, the author will carefully describe the problem, the purpose of the study, its significance and background, the method, the results, the limitations of the findings, and specific implication for practice. Detailed descriptions are required; broad statements will not suffice.

Because the reader does not have an opportunity to converse with the author(s), the manuscript’s content must be presented clearly and coherently. Headings assist readers to make the transition from topic to topic. A well-written abstract will catch the attention of readers when they are doing a literature search or skimming the journal’s content. The presentation of new ideas will motivate readers to continue reading the article to the end. Sustaining the reader’s involvement requires presenting original content in a fresh and stimulating manner with approaches that vary according to the type of article being prepared.

**Keys to Success**

- Obtain the information for authors for the type of manuscript that you have selected, and adhere to every point made in these guidelines. Attention to detail is very important and is looked upon positively by the reviewers and journal editor.
- Recognize that poster presentations provide only a basic outline of the content. Much more detail is required for a published
Bridging the Gap Between Poster and Manuscript

...article. In addition, publications generally need more complete content, including the implications for practice, than poster presentations.

- Organize the manuscript carefully. It must present innovative ideas, flow coherently, and contain specific data-supported statements rather than broad generalities. Having an outline of how the content should flow is helpful, but you should recognize that this outline will probably be revised when your content is put into written form.

- Be passionate about your topic, yet remain open to constructive feedback from colleagues who review your initial draft(s). Constantly think of how this manuscript will benefit the readers of the journal and nursing practice in general.

- Select the time of day when your ideas are most inclined to spontaneously occur and reward yourself if necessary when even small advances occur.

- Acknowledge that writing takes time and do not get discouraged. Get your ideas written down and recognize that even experienced writers rewrite many times to achieve the clearest statement of their ideas. Sometimes it helps to complete the easiest sections of the manuscript first.

- Ask a valued colleague who has published before to provide constructive and timely feedback before you submit your manuscript to the selected journal. An added advantage of the manuscript compared to the poster is that the writer may receive suggestions for manuscript revision from colleagues as well as the journal editor or review panel.

- Understand that multiple rewrites may be required and that feedback ultimately will greatly improve the quality of your manuscript. It is important not to take criticism personally and to respond to the recommended revisions. When resubmitting a manuscript for reconsideration by a journal, you should succinctly describe how all the reviewers’ comments were specifically addressed.

After a poster presentation, the preparation and publication of a manuscript is often the next step in sharing information with an even larger audience. The transformation of a poster into a manuscript demands a different set of skills combined with the tenacity to complete the task. For new as well as experienced authors, having a colleague who can provide constructive feedback can greatly enhance your likelihood of success. Feedback from this valued colleague as well as the journal review panel and editor will help you develop your manuscript until it is ready for publication. Because nurses in all settings have important information to share with other nurses and healthcare professionals, the development of a manuscript from a poster presentation is a valuable skill to acquire.

Additional Resources for Manuscript Development


Web Sites

Assistance with APA format: www.apa.org/journals
Writing and language resources: www.cats.ohiou.edu/esl/english/