

# USAID Global Education Conference

## Poster Session Format Toolkit



### Learning Objectives | with this toolkit you will be able to:

- **Outline** the basic principles of adult learning.
- **Observe** how to facilitate and present poster sessions well.
- **Integrate** recommended practices into the design and facilitation of your poster session.

# Table of Contents

[Conference Vision](#)

[Adult Learning Principles](#)

[Mel Silberman's Top 10 Training/Facilitation Tips](#)

[Poster Presentations / Visual Displays](#)

[Poster Example](#)

[Key Takeaways](#)

[Additional Resources](#)

## Conference Vision

The 2020 USAID Global Education Conference is our opportunity to create an ongoing system of learning, build relationships and networks across sectors and countries, and share our collective knowledge, evidence, and experience to better support education as a critical part of a country's journey to self-reliance.



As the education sector, we are committed to creating spaces and opportunities that apply best practices in adult learning and encourage active engagement. This means relying less on lectured PowerPoint presentations and instead applying more innovative formats and methods that are better suited to spark and support learning around a given topic.

## Adult Learning Principles



“My conception of adult learning is this: a cooperative venture in non authoritarian, informal learning, the chief purpose of which is to discover the meaning of experience; a quest of the mind which digs down to the roots of the preconceptions which formulate our conduct; a technique of learning for adults which makes education coterminous with life and hence elevates living itself to the level of adventurous experiment.”

- Malcolm Knowles | Author, *The Adult Learner*

### [Mel Silberman's Top 10 Training/Facilitation Tips](#)

Mel Silberman is the author of the seminal book, [Active Training: A Handbook of Techniques, Designs, Case Examples, and Tips](#), among many other books on adult education. Below are his top 10 tips for designing and facilitating successful learning sessions for adults.

- 1. It's not what you give them; it's what they take away that counts.** Our minds are like sponges as we soak up knowledge and information. When sponges are saturated, any additional water will run right through. Just as the sponge is overloaded, a learner can experience cognitive overload when he or she receives more information than the brain can store in its working memory. It doesn't matter how much information you disseminate. If the learner does not retain that information, learning has not taken place. The challenge to the trainer is to present information in such a way that participants do not experience overload.
- 2. You can't hide in a pair.** Don't overlook the power of pairs to promote active learning. Asking participants to work with learning partners is an efficient and effective active-learning technique. It guarantees 100 percent participation.
- 3. Telling is not training.** The belief that "I gave them information," "covered the material," or "told them how to do it" is very misleading for both the trainer and the learner. Telling, explaining, or lecturing does not guarantee the receiver of the information understands it. Learning is not an automatic result of pouring information in another person's head. People learn by doing, not by being told.

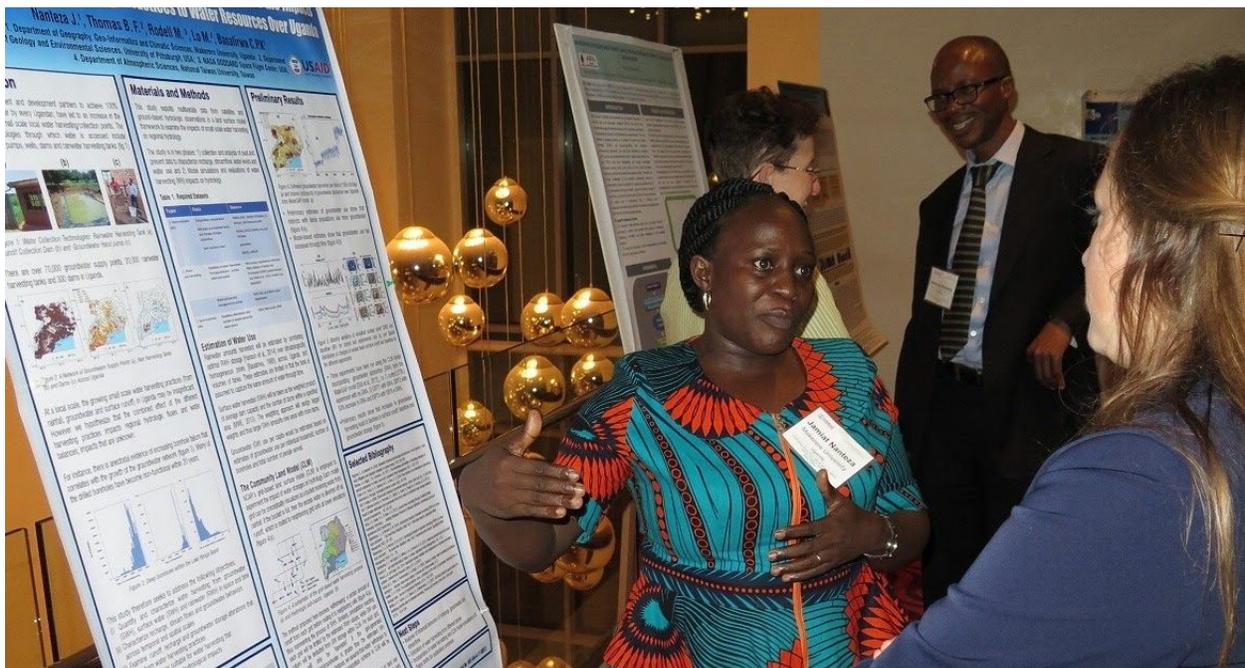
4. **Distinguish between "need to know" and "nice to know."** When designing your training program (session), focus on what participants absolutely need to know. This is particularly important when there are time constraints. Don't try to cram eight hours of content into a two-hour program. By clearly defining objectives for what participants will know and be able to do by the end of the sessions, trainers clarify content and select appropriate learning strategies.
5. **Inquiring minds want to know.** Human beings are naturally curious. If you have any doubt, just watch young children exploring and learning about the world around them. Take advantage of that innate curiosity. Create learning experiences that require the learning to seek something such as an answer to a question, information to solve a problem, or ways to do his or her job.
6. **When training is active, the participants do the work.** Participants work in concert, encouraging and facilitating one another's efforts to achieve, complete tasks, and reach the group's goals. People understand concepts better and retain information longer when they are actively involved with the learning process. The trainer's role is to create an environment in which learning takes place and to facilitate the learning process.
7. **People will remember what they figure out for themselves.** One of the trainer's objectives is to get participants to think. Learning experiences that require participants to use their minds will result in better retention, both long term and short term.
8. **Get them active from the start.** Getting people involved from the very beginning through some type of opening activity accomplishes several purposes. Techniques that immediately involve participants are very effective in piquing interest, arousing curiosity, and preparing them for the learning experience. They can help reduce tension and anxieties, energize the group, set a tone for the session, and involve everyone. Most importantly, opening activities communicate to the participants that they are not going to sit back and be passive learners or receivers of information.
9. **It's not about you.** Focus on your audience, not on yourself. Unfortunately, some trainers are more concerned about showcasing themselves and demonstrating how much they know. When you put the needs of the learner first, you automatically change the way you design and deliver training.

10. **When I *hear*, I forget. When I *hear and see*, I remember a little. When I *hear, see, and ask questions or discuss* with someone else, I begin to understand. When I *hear, see, discuss, and do*, I acquire knowledge and skill. When I *teach* to another, I master.** This Active Learning Credo is a modification of what Confucius declared over 2400 years ago: "What I *hear*, I forget. What I *see*, I remember. What I *do*, I understand."

## Poster Presentations / Visual Displays

Posters or other visual displays share research findings and methodology, a learning, a framework, or a visual story about a particular topic. All the visual displays will be set up in a gallery space on a given day and/or time. During the conference, attendees will be encouraged to walk the space, converse with the designers, and share ideas as they circulate.

This is an ideal format for highlighting research, showing the impact of your work, or sharing a resource that can help people make more informed decisions or provide more guidance around implementation.

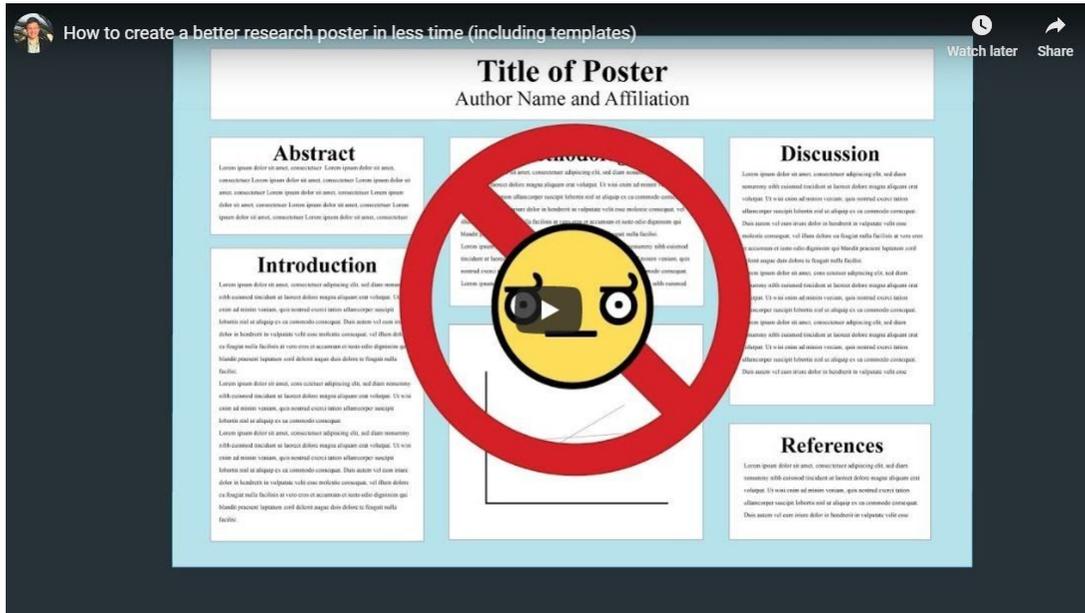


“A good conference poster catches people’s attention and makes them excited to hear about your research before they even read about it or talk to you.”

- Avani Sadana

## Poster Example

In this funny and creative animation, Mike Morrison shares how to make conference posters more efficient and more fun with a design approach that is both more usable, and easier to create!

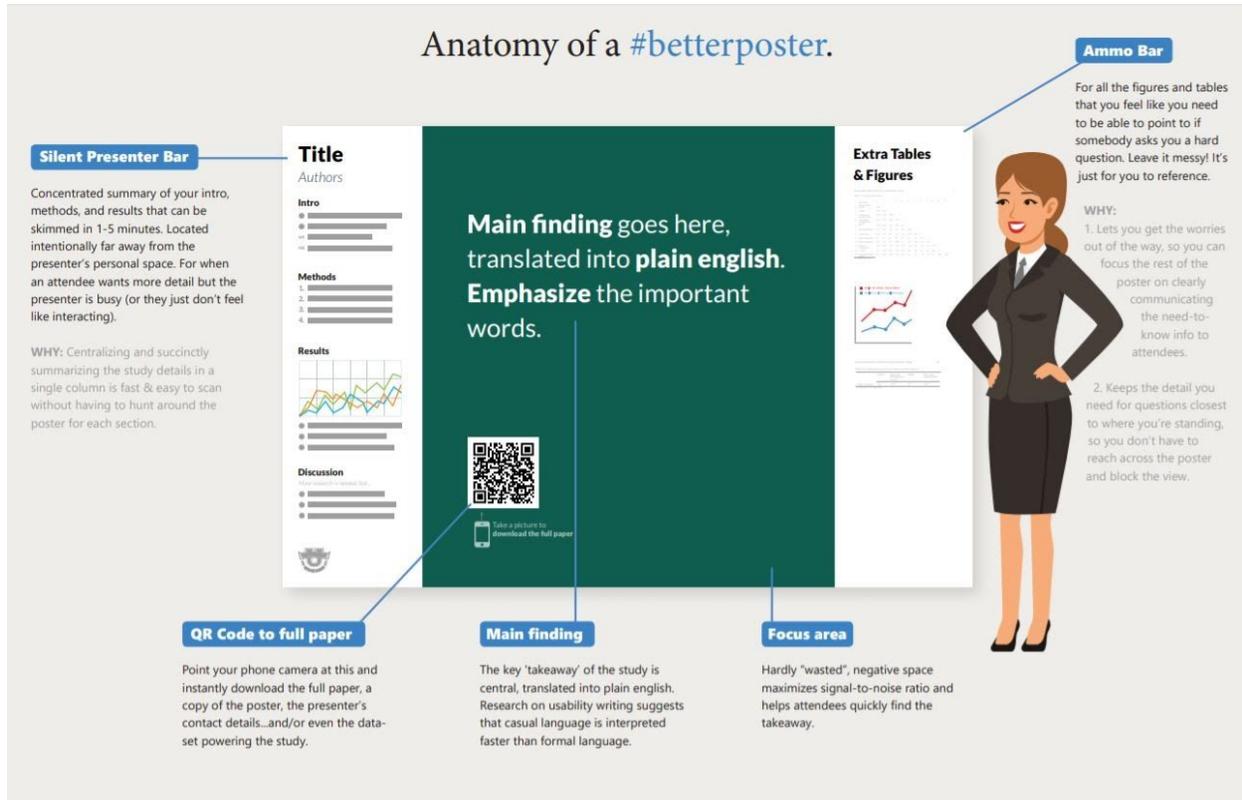


(click on the image above to watch the video)

## Key Takeaways

- **The insight/finding/learning is maximized on the poster.** As a viewer you can't miss it or lose it as you walk through and browse other posters.
- **The layout encourages and supports conversation with folks who stop to ask questions,** while still providing easily accessible information for people with whom you are not able to converse.
- **The structure/template is easy and straightforward** and can be replicated using flip chart paper and 8.5 x 11 printouts if you don't have the budget to spend money on professional printing.

## Anatomy of a #betterposter.



The diagram illustrates the layout of a research poster with several key sections and callouts. On the left is the 'Silent Presenter Bar' containing a vertical list of sections: Title, Authors, Intro, Methods, Results, and Discussion. The center features a large green 'Main finding' area with a QR code and a 'Focus area' below it. On the right is the 'Ammo Bar' with 'Extra Tables & Figures'. A woman in a business suit stands next to the poster, pointing towards the 'Ammo Bar'.

**Silent Presenter Bar**

Concentrated summary of your intro, methods, and results that can be skimmed in 1-5 minutes. Located intentionally far away from the presenter's personal space. For when an attendee wants more detail but the presenter is busy (or they just don't feel like interacting).

WHY: Centralizing and succinctly summarizing the study details in a single column is fast & easy to scan without having to hunt around the poster for each section.

**Title**  
Authors

**Intro**

**Methods**

**Results**

**Discussion**

**QR Code to full paper**

Point your phone camera at this and instantly download the full paper, a copy of the poster, the presenter's contact details...and/or even the dataset powering the study.

**Main finding**

The key 'takeaway' of the study is central, translated into plain english. Research on usability writing suggests that casual language is interpreted faster than formal language.

**Focus area**

Hardly "wasted", negative space maximizes signal-to-noise ratio and helps attendees quickly find the takeaway.

**Extra Tables & Figures**

**Ammo Bar**

For all the figures and tables that you feel like you need to be able to point to if somebody asks you a hard question. Leave it messy! It's just for you to reference.

WHY:

1. Lets you get the worries out of the way, so you can focus the rest of the poster on clearly communicating the need-to-know info to attendees.
2. Keeps the detail you need for questions closest to where you're standing, so you don't have to reach across the poster and block the view.

## Additional Resources

- [To Save the Science Poster, Researchers Want to Kill It and Start Over](#). NPR, 2019.
- [Visual and UX Design Principles Can Improve the Effectiveness of Poster Sessions](#)
- [QR Code Generator](#)