

USAID Global Education Conference

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 various session formats well.
- **Integrate** recommended practices into the design and facilitation of your session.

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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.

Principles of Adult Learning



“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."

Fireside Chats

In this format, a guest is interviewed by another person (talk show/podcast style) to uncover key elements of the guest's story and knowledge, while also turning to the audience for their questions and comments to help guide the conversation.

This is an ideal format for a deep dive into one (or two) person's expertise, insights, and experience with a particular topic.



“The usefulness of the knowledge we acquire and the effectiveness of the actions we take depend on the quality of the questions we ask. Questions open the door to dialogue and discovery. They are an invitation to creativity and breakthrough thinking. Questions can lead to movement and action on key issues; by generating creative insights, they can ignite change.”

- Juanita Brown

[Fireside Chat Example #1](#)

In this fireside chat Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, an award-winning Nigerian author whose work deals with race, identity and gender, speaks to The Economist's public policy editor Sacha Nauta about some of the most pressing issues facing society today.



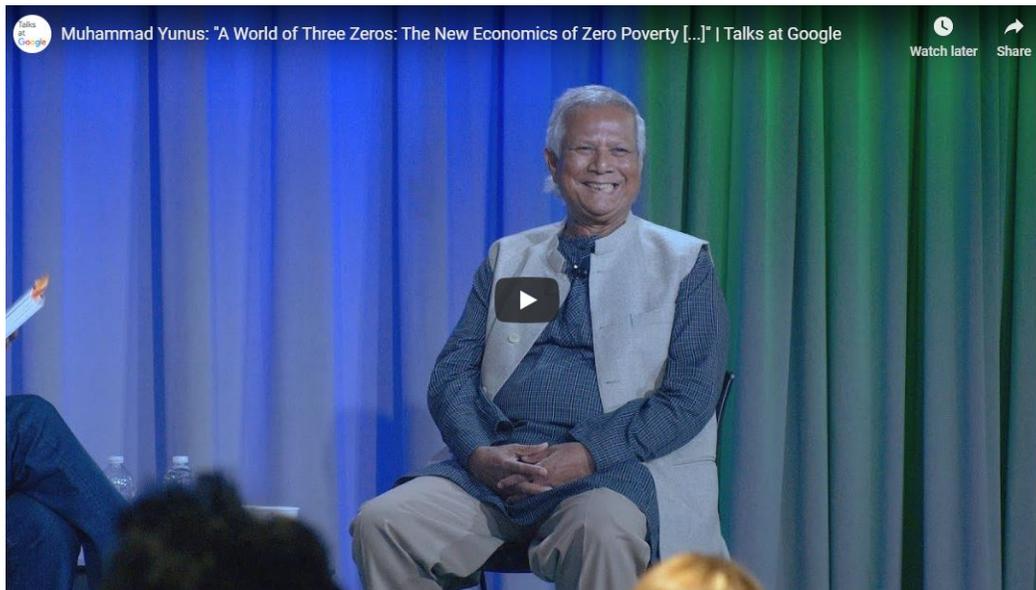
(click on the image above to watch the video)

What Went Well?

- **The interviewer starts the interview with an interesting question** that explores something that goes beyond the guest's standard biography.
- **The guest explores complex topics without relying on PowerPoint slides.** Instead, her expertise is teased out and highlighted through the interviewer's questions.
- **The interviewer and guest are not following a script.** There was clearly preparation that went into the questions, yet the conversation still flowed naturally between the two of them.

Fireside Chat Example #2

A winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and bestselling author of "Banker to the Poor," Muhammad Yunus Comes to Google to talk about his new book "A World of Three Zeroes?" Joining him on stage is Google X Quantumagician, Jack Hidary, for a fireside chat.



(click on the image above to watch the video)

What Went Well?

- The interviewer provides a short compelling story to introduce the guest.
- The interviewer briefly outlines the process of the chat and what's in store for the audience. He asks people to start thinking about questions at the beginning of the conversation.
- The interviewer asks questions and gives prompts that help ensure the conversation touches on the main points they want to convey to the audience. For example, he structures the first part of the conversation around the "Three Zeros."
- The interviewer models good active listening through encouraging the guest to say more or go deeper on a thread, clarifying or restating things the guest has said to ensure the audience captures those main points, and re-framing the conversation to bring it back into focus on the main points.

- **The interviewer gives clear guidance to audience members asking questions -** introduce yourself and keep it short so we can get a lot of questions in.

Design and Facilitation Tips

- **Decide what story you want to tell, knowledge you want to share, or idea you want to unpack.** In other words, what's the main goal of your fireside chat? You want to make sure that its not a rambling dialogue with no point, but rather an intentional conversation that touches on the essential elements and covers the critical points.
- **Decide if you want to do the interviewing or if you are going to be interviewed.** Regardless of what you choose, the interviewer and interviewee should work together to develop a set of questions that will allow the conversation to achieve its intended goal.
- **Start with a fun icebreaker question** to settle the guest and introduce her/him to the audience in an interesting way. Try and avoid an introduction that's just a vocal version of the speaker's bio one can find online or in the conference program.
- **Involve the audience right at the beginning.** For example, show the audience three intro icebreaker questions and raising hands or round of applause have them select which one the interviewer should ask to start the conversation.
- **Poll the audience around a prompt or question** so the speaker can get a feel for what's of interest to people in the audience. You could present questions/prompts on a slide and have the audience vote by raising their hands or using a polling app on their smartphone.
- **Discourage monologuing and instead create a more conversational dynamic.** The interviewer should feel comfortable to jump in with follow up questions go with the natural flow of a conversation instead of sticking to a predetermined script.

Additional Resources

- [Why and How to Organize Fireside Chats at Your Event.](#) Medium.com, 2016 (article)
- [A Four Step Plan to Make Your Q&A More Audience Friendly.](#) Harvard Business Review, 2018 (article)
- [Hosting a Fireside Chat? Here Are Three Tips to Make It Great.](#) Poll Everywhere Blog (article)

Ignite Talks / Pecha Kuchas

Designed to deliver a 7-minute, timed and automated presentation (20 slides, 20 seconds per slide). This format provides presenters with a structured format that helps them focus on key points and to design slides that communicate through visuals and minimal text. Proposals using this format will most likely be grouped with 1-3 other ignite talks that focus on interconnected topics to form one 60-minute session.

This is an ideal format for sharing an example of a project, activity, or approach and the impact that it has had.



“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

- Maya Angelou

Ignite Talk Example #1

In this presentation, USAID Administrator Mark Green lays out the Agency's new Journey to Self Reliance initiative and the tools that will ensure programs effectively support a country's development journey so we can move closer to the day that foreign assistance is no longer needed. The presentation is followed by a conversation between Administrator Green and Concordia CEO Matt Swift.



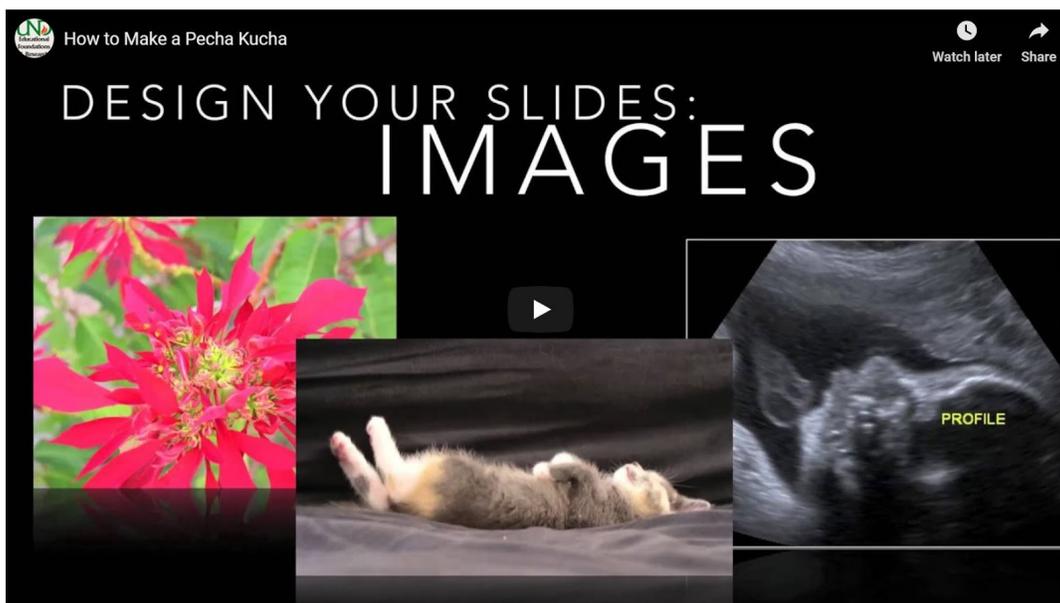
(click on the image above to watch the video)

What Went Well?

- **He starts off with a story** to personalize his passion and interest in what he is about the present.
- **He utilizes very little text** and instead relies more on powerful images that are connected to what he is talking about.
- **He has clearly practiced and rehearsed.** His pacing is comfortable, he moves around the stage, and makes good eye contact with the audience.

[Pecha Kucha Example #2](#)

In this presentation, Dr. Marcus Weaver Hightower describes what a pecha kucha is, how to make one, and how to deliver it. The video is itself in the form of a pecha kucha.



(click on the image above to watch the video)

[Key Takeaways](#)

- Watch some Pecha Kucha presentations at PechKucha.org to see how others have used this format.
- **Plan out what you are going to say.** Script out slide by slide what you are going to say and what the audience will see. The key is whittling down the ideas to their essence.
- **Wait to make your slides until after you are done planning and scripting what you are going to say.** Let the content drive the design process and then enhance with the creating or finding the visuals for the slides.
- **Engage with your audience** by making eye contact, animating your voice, and using hand gestures. Try to avoid just reading from a piece of paper or note cards.
- **Practice! Practice! Practice!**

Facilitation and Presentation Tips

- **Embrace the 20 slide, 20 seconds per slide format.** It will help structure your presentation, focus your thoughts, and crystallize your main points.
- **Rely on images, and less on text.** A picture speaks a thousand words, so let them speak in a way that reinforces what you are vocalizing. If you do have text only include keywords, not entire sentences.
- **Script out each slide and practice your timing.** Remember its automated. "Winging it" will not serve you on the day of the presentation.

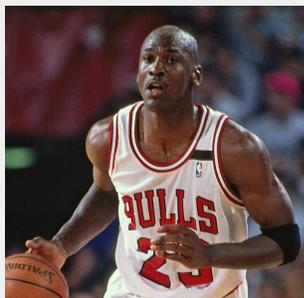
Additional Resources

- [Hate Long Rambling Speeches? Try Pecha Kucha.](#) NPR, 2010 (article)
- [PechaKucha about PechaKucha](#) by Hans Van de Water, 2017 (video)
- [TED's Secret to Great Public Speaking](#) by Chris Anderson, 2016 (video)

Fail Fest / Risky Business Stories

Designed to embrace the learning value of taking risks. Presenters share a story that celebrates a risk they have taken in their work and did not pan out as hoped, but nonetheless led to valuable learning. After the stories are shared, participants in the audience ask the storyteller(s) questions to learn more about what happened.

This is an ideal format for unpacking challenges and lessons learned from your work.



"I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

- Michael Jordan

Fail Fest Story Example #1

In this presentation, Rikita Kurup, the Assistant Director of ReadySetSoar, shares their "Fail Forward" story at the 2013 Cradle to Career Network Convening in Dallas, Texas.



(click on the image above to watch the video)

What Went Well?

- **She follows the 4-part fail story construction, clearly articulating:**
 - (1) what the program tried
 - (2) when they started to notice things were not going as planned
 - (3) how they pivoted
 - (4) what lessons were learned.
- **Her story is less than 10 minutes.** A fail story should not be long. It's important to paint a picture of what happened and get to the point, but not include a lot of unnecessary details.

Fail Fest Example #2

In this presentation at the FHI 360 Challenge Conference, Wayan Vota gives a talk on failure - the unspoken partner to innovation and scale in international development programs. This is not a "Fail Fest" story, per se, but in this presentation he does share the importance of celebrating failure. He also models good public speaking techniques and hence there is much that can be learned about this format with this example.



(click on the image above to watch the video)

What Went Well?

- **Engaged the audience right at the beginning** asking folks to raise their hands if they feel they have failed in a development project. He also closes his talk by engaging the audience at the end.
- **He injects humor throughout his presentation** to keep the audience energy light and fun.
- **He is clearly well rehearsed**, allowing him to have good pacing, good eye contact with the entire audience, and clarity in the points he is making.

Design and Presentation Tips

- **Your story should be ten minutes or less.** Think about someone telling a story at the dinner table or at a social gathering. Anything that goes on for more than 10 minutes, uninterrupted, will most likely be perceived as too long. Audience members will have an opportunity to ask questions about your story, so you will have time to elaborate on certain aspects of it if need be.
- **Practice telling your story in front of friends and colleagues.** Get their reactions and feedback to where the story was clear/unclear, too fast or too slow, etc. and then refine accordingly.
- **Use the 4-part fail story structure:**
 - Part 1 - here is what we tried...
 - Part 2 - this is when we knew it wasn't working...
 - Part 3 - this is how we pivoted...
 - Part 4 - here is what we learned...

Additional Resources

- [Fail Fest FAQs](#). FailFestival.org
- [Fail Fest Workshop Kit](#). Wikimedia.org
- [Why Failure Is the Foundation of Innovation](#). Inc.com (article)
- [8 Ways Smart People Use Failure to Their Advantage](#). LinkedIn.com (article)

Panel Discussions

Designed to present multiple viewpoints and perspectives on a single topic. Sessions using this format are strongly encouraged to include panelists from different sectors, agencies, implementing partners, or partner country governments. A strong panel also ensures diversity across genders.

This is an ideal format for exploring a topic through multiple perspectives and across stakeholder groups.

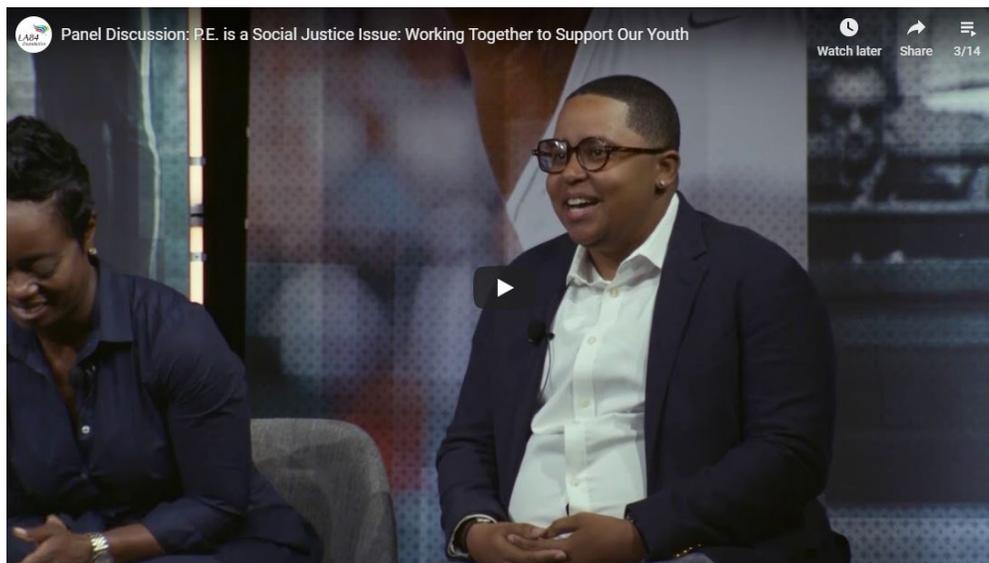


“If you attend enough panel discussions, you already know that the worst ones feel like a plodding public access TV show — and you can’t switch the channel. The best feel like a fast-paced, unpredictable conversation between smart people on stage and smart people in the audience. Keep that goal in mind...”

- Scott Kirsner | Editor, Innovation Leader

Panel Discussion Example #1

The panel discussion from the 2018 LA84 Conference explores how people can work together to close the play equity gap, because a child's ability to play, should not be determined by their zip code.



(click on the image above to watch the video)

What Went Well?

- **The moderator provides short but adequate introductions for the panelists.** The moderator does not spend a lot of time reading long bios that audience members can read on their own in the program or online. She provides just enough information to establish the reason they are up on stage and part of the discussion. She begins the discussion by asking a more personal question to the panelists about the source of their passion for play equity as a social justice issue.
- **The panelists provide enough space and time for each other.** There is an awareness that there are multiple voices that have been invited to weigh in on the topic. No one panelist goes on for too long.
- **A lot of substantial discussion occurs in just 30 minutes.** This makes time and space available for a robust Q&A with the audience (not seen in the video above).

Panel Discussion Example #2

Part 1 of this series of Facebook Live panel discussions, focuses on the strategic civil resistance and peacebuilding methods used by Dr. King and how they are being successfully applied in various contexts today. Activists and peacebuilding experts examine how nonviolent tactics like protest and non-cooperation work with peacebuilding practices, such as conflict analysis, dialogue and negotiation, to resolve violent conflict and advance positive social change.



(click on the image above to watch the video)

What Went Well?

- **The panelists introduce themselves by answering a thought provoking question that connects the session topic to something that is unique to their life.** The question is also posed to the audience at the start of the discussion and they are asked to respond using a web based platform.
- **Powerful images are shown to anchor different questions and prompts throughout the discussion.** This allows for the audience to be visually and audibly connected to the information.
- **Audience members are invited to pose their questions throughout the discussion using a web based platform.** This allows for questions to be asked in real time as opposed to holding them all to the end of the panel discussion.

Design and Facilitation Tips

- **Engage the audience early and often.** For example, as a moderator you could poll the audience on their reactions to questions or prompts and then have the panel react to what they see/hear from the audience. Polling an audience is relatively simple by posing a question or prompt and having folks in the audience raise their hand, applaud, or stand up depending on their response.
- **Ensure gender balance on the panel.** Make sure that your panel is accurately reflecting the diversity of perspectives that can be brought to a particular topic, especially around gender. For too long, panel discussions have been dominated by men, and have insufficiently represented leading female voices on a topic. The head of the National Institute of Health actually [refuses to participate in any panels](#) that only have men on them.
- **Structure the discussion around a common problem or question,** as opposed to each panelists just giving their own presentation. Make sure that your panel discussion DOES NOT turn into 3-5 separate power point presentations following by a short Q&A.

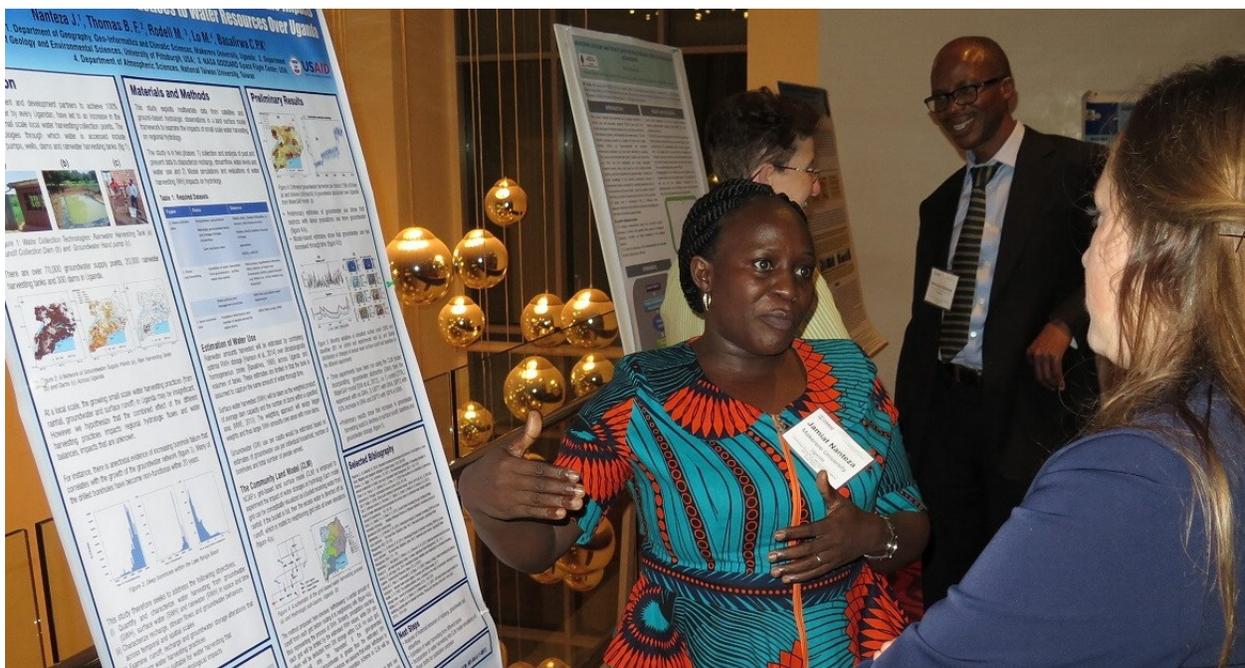
Additional Resources

- Kirsner, Scott. [How to Moderate a Panel Like a Pro](#). Harvard Business Review, 2013.
- Hough, Karen. [Moderating a Panel: 8 Ways to Run an Excellent Discussion](#). Huffington Post, 2014.

Poster Presentations / Visual Displays

Participants prepare a poster or other visual display that shares research findings and methodology, a learning, a framework, or a visual story about a particular topic. All the visual displays are set up in a gallery space and throughout the conference, attendees are 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.

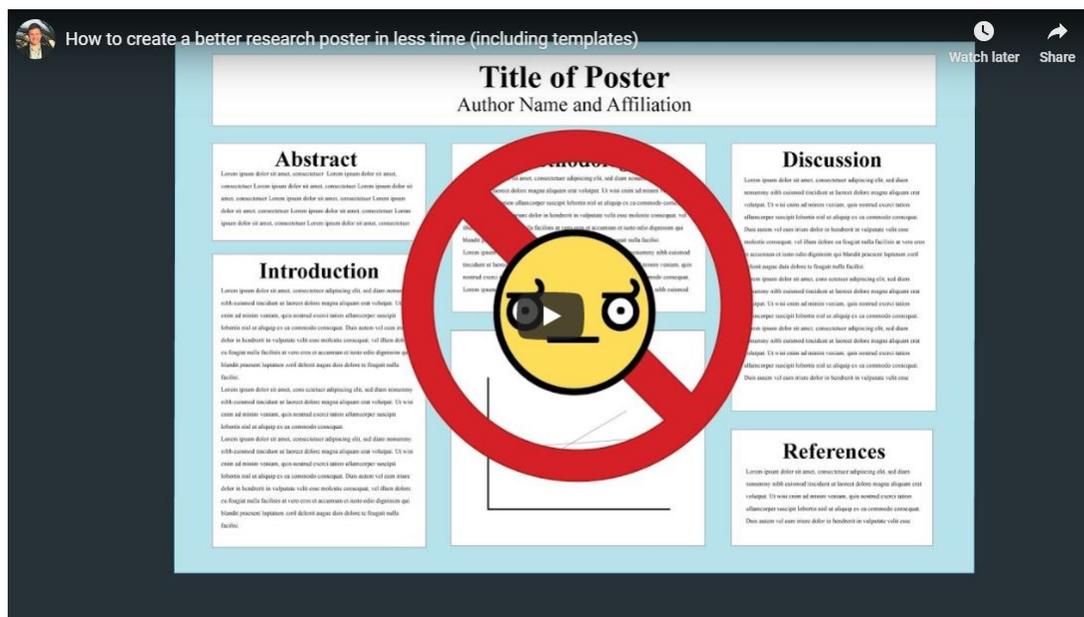


“A good conference poster catches people’s attention and makes them excited to hear about your research before they even read about it or talk to you.”

- 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.

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

Extra Tables & Figures

Main finding goes here, translated into plain english. Emphasize the important words.

QR Code to full paper

Focus area

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.](#)

Round Table Discussions / Fish Bowls

Designed to leverage the collective wisdom and insight of a small- to medium-sized group. The session lead comes with an overarching topic and a list of questions/prompts for a group of people to discuss. One way to facilitate a more participatory round table is by setting up a "fishbowl." The fishbowl technique seeds the discussion with a group of 4-7 people sitting in an inner circle (called the fishbowl), while the rest of the audience listens and observes the fishbowl from an outer circle. As the discussion grows people in the inner circle can leave the "fishbowl" and folks from the outer circle can enter.

This is an ideal format for harvesting the collective wisdom and experience from a small to medium-sized group in order to address a "problem of practice" or explore a question through a more dialogic process.

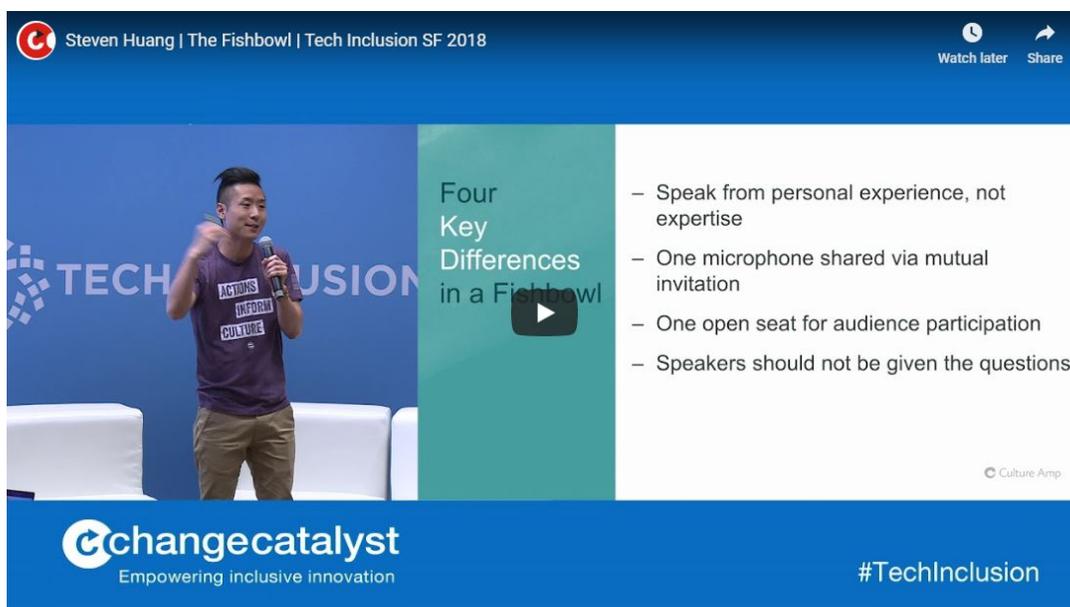


“There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication.... Try the experiment of communicating, with fullness and accuracy, some experience to another, especially if it be somewhat complicated, and you will find your own attitude toward your experience changing.”

- John Dewey

Fish Bowl Example #1

In this short presentation, Steve Huang provides a good overview of what a fishbowl discussion is. Applying this kind of facilitation to a round table format makes for a much more participatory conversation that is welcoming and inclusive of viewpoints and perspective of the entire audience, not just a select group of people.



(click on the image above to watch the video)

Key Takeaways

- **Encourage participants to speak from personal experience**, as opposed to expertise. Speaking from personal and lived experiences tends to be more powerful than sharing abstract research, data, or theories.
- **Always have an open seat in the center circle welcoming others to come and join the conversation.** It may take a little encouraging at the beginning of the discussion, but after a while people will begin learning how to step in and step out of the conversation.
- **Set clear guidelines and instructions at the beginning of the discussion** to ensure everybody knows how it works and what they are being encouraged to do.

Fish Bowl Example #2

This fish bowl style discussion from the 2016 Games User Research (GamesUR) conference does an excellent job modelling how to set up a fishbowl and encourage participation from the audience.



(click on the image above to watch the video)

What Went Well?

- **The facilitator gives very clear and concise instructions on how the fishbowl format works.** He also references that this is a format that addresses some of the commonly heard complaints about conference, that being there is not enough opportunities for participants to share, converse and be heard. The fishbowl format is a way to get more voices into the important conversations.
- **The facilitator begins the discussion with an interesting but "easier" topic in order to get folks comfortable with the format.** Sequencing of questions and prompts are an essential consideration when helping a group develop the confidence to have a fruitful discussion.
- **The panelists freely move in and out of the "fishbowl."** They don't wait to be called on or invited up. In addition, they stay focused on "problems of practice" and the entire discussion is geared towards helping each other tackle various challenges.

Additional Resources

- Huang, Steven. [The Fishbowl: A New Way to Facilitate Difficult Conversations](#). 2018 (video)
- McLellan, Lila. [The Tired Old Conference Panel Is Getting a Makeover with the Fishbowl Format](#). Quartz, 2017 (article)
- [Fishbowl: Maximizing Participation in Direct Conversation with Experts](#). UNICEF, 2015 (Toolbox)