

Communicating Psychological Science: 5 Tips for Creating an Effective Poster Presentation

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The first time creating a scientific poster to present at psychological conferences can be confusing and nerve-racking for many, especially undergraduate students. If you are studying or working at a higher education institution, the university's writing center or libraries will have a lot of resources on how to prepare a poster, including specific examples (e.g., New York University, 2022). If you don't have access to these resources, there is a multitude of cost-free online information that you can use. As an early-career student researcher and [Emerging Scholar Award](#) winner from the 2022 APS Convention, I will provide some personal experiences and advice to create an effective poster.

Think of a poster as a creative visual outlet!

When planning your poster, visualize the methods, designs, and results in figure forms like graphs, plots, or charts, rather than in text form like an essay or a manuscript. You should have fun, enjoy the process, and explore your artistic skills! Although some conferences may have specific requirements for font size, font color, or the number of figures/tables you can include, you can still express your unique taste through mapping the layout that fits your study. For instance, in experimental designs, if your results are not significant but the methods are thorough and thought-provoking, you can save more space to draw the flowcharts that explain the procedures or include the materials that you showed the participants. My first poster was presented at the 2022 Western Psychological Association Convention (Figure 1), and I believe the results were the most exciting part, so I placed them in the center. This poster is not my best draft (and you're not expected to master anything in the first try!), but I think you can learn a lot from my shortcomings to improve your own presentation.

We found a compelling family dynamic of college students: directing mothers suppress their children's motivation and cause more career-related stress.

Potential Effect of Mother's Occupational Shared Agency on Occupational Goal Stress: The Mediating Role of Selective Secondary Control Strategies

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INTRODUCTION

THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

- Chang et al. (2010)'s *parental shared agency*: youths can be more successful when parents are also motivated to help them accomplish their goals. In contrast, *parental non-shared agency* may evoke youths' sense of disconnection, insecurity, and discouragement
- Heckhausen et al. (2010)'s *motivational theory of life-span development model*: motivational thinking can boost goal engagement behaviors in *difficult* time or under *limited* resources. It helps youths avoid distraction, commit more to life goals, and envision positive imagery of incentives with goal attainment
- We focused on the specific roles of *mothers'* shared agency with their children and the roles of *motivational thinking* on alleviating *career goal stress*

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS & PROCEDURES

- 1,710 college students from large public universities in northeastern and western U.S.
- Mostly females (66.1%); aged 18–29 ($M = 21.40$, $SD = 4.03$)
- Racially diverse: 25.99% Asian; 8.15% Black; 19.16% Hispanic; 2.01% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders; 33.28% White; 11.42% Mixed/Other

MEASURES

Occupational Shared and Non-shared Agency

- Occupational Shared Agency—support and collaboration (5 items each; 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree)
- Occupational Non-shared Agency—directing and noninvolvement (5 items each; 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree)

Selective Secondary Control Strategies

- Occupational-Specific Optimization in Primary and Secondary Control Scale (OPOS)—Selective Secondary Control (2 items; 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree)
- "I often remind myself how important it is for my future to have a good career"; & "When I think about my career, I try to be confident that I will be successful"

Occupational Stress

- Occupational Goal Attitudes (3 items; 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree)
- "My occupational goal is very stressful for me to pursue"

RESULTS



Main point in simple English

Create figures that represent model building processes and how the results were interpreted.

Provide examples for survey questions used

Variables	Dependent	Independent	Corr.	Direct	Indirect	Total
Motivational Thinking		Supportive	.202***	.097***	—	.097***
		Collaborative	.152***	-.015	—	-.015
		Directing	-.043	-.021	—	-.021
Career Stress		Noninvolved	-.180***	-.067	—	-.067***
		Motivational Thinking	.096***	.178***	—	.178***
		Supportive	-.056*	-.042	.013***	-.025
		Collaborative	-.032	-.013	-.003	-.015
		Directing	.193***	.185***	-.004	.181***
		Noninvolved	.042	.031	-.012**	.019

Notes. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 1. Summary of Direct, Indirect, and Total Effect and Correlation Coefficients ($N = 1,710$)

DISCUSSION

- Both supportive and noninvolved mothers could directly influence their children's level of career-related stress through stimulating more or less motivational thinking.
- While directing mothers have no impact on motivational thinking, they can directly cause more stress to their children's career goal pursuit.
- However, the direction between motivational thinking and career-related stress is not clear. Should career-related stress lead to more motivational thinking?
- Future longitudinal studies would help examine better effects of motivational thinking on reducing career-related stress and investigate why collaborative mothers may not significantly lower levels of career-goal stress or may reduce/increase motivational thinking.

Scan the QR code to get a copy of the poster!



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Figure 1. Poster presented at the Western Psychological Association (WPA) 102nd Annual Convention at Portland, Oregon (Bui & Chang, 2022)

View your poster from audience's perspectives.

Consider the potential audience when presenting your poster. Do you have an intriguing title that can capture their first impression? Is the poster readable with the appropriate font size and colors? You would not want to make a poster with 10 different colors or have walls of texts with a font size of 12 on a 36 x 48 poster (even size 20 is small, in my opinion). In addition, consider your audience's levels of interest and information retention. Try to include only the main results and/or the key takeaway messages that people can easily remember after 2 to 5 minutes of listening to your presentation. It's always tempting to put every detail into your poster, yet the goal is not to show how much you know, but to inform the audience about a phenomenon and foster discussions about the findings, future directions, or related studies.

Present with simple words and relatable narratives.

To make your study more memorable, try to use simple, plain English and avoid abbreviations when presenting your results, as not everyone in your audience may know the technical jargon. Even if you're presenting to specialists in the field, it would be useful to explain the measures you used in your study.

For example, if I were to present to a general audience, I would use ‘thinking processes’ instead of ‘cognition.’ Also prepare some narratives or personal comments and analogies to transform an abstract topic into a concrete image that the audience can remember. For instance, if you study motivation and goal engagement strategies, try to ask the audience about some of their academic, career, or health-related goals and habits to start the conversation.

[See all Communicating Psychological Science columns](#)

Use social media to communicate your study.

In addition to creating and presenting a poster, share your findings on social media sites like Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, and your personal blog! Practice open science as a movement, or in Hagger’s (2022) view, a ‘mindset’ to increase accessibility and future research contributions. To further communicate your own research publicly, you can also include a QR code in your poster that links to a digital copy of the poster, a short video presentation of your study, and your personal contacts. This practice can be especially helpful if you are a student or an early-career researcher, as you will increase your presence in the academic community and welcome potential feedback from senior researchers. And having your first conference poster presented already makes you a great example for other junior researchers.

Stay confident and open-minded!

Don’t be discouraged if you encounter nonsignificant results or harsh criticisms! Research is about nonstop revisions, so you always have opportunities to adjust your methods, designs, and analyses (Brock, 2019). People have different preferences over how psychological science research should be conducted and how posters should be presented, so don’t worry too much if your results are not broadly significant or if people have strong opinions about your study approach. Nonsignificant results are meaningful themselves! Be open-minded and learn about new topics, but also believe in yourself and your ability to do research.

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