

The Challenger

The Newsletter of the MU McNair Scholars Program

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Tips on Making an Effective Poster

Posters are a great tool to get complicated research ideas across to a general audience. Simultaneously they allow those familiar with the topic to see all the nuances of the research. The key task of a poster is to appeal to both audiences. To do this, the idea of design and approach must be considered.

When creating the poster, don't let the background distract from the content. A large picture for the background may be good at times, however, it can distract and overwhelm the reader. In order to keep these distractions to a minimum, use the gridlines available in PowerPoint to make sure everything is straight and aligned. Additionally, "chunk" the information together. "Chunking" information allows the reader to skim the poster and get the general idea very quickly. The poster is not a paper, but rather an often times visual representation of key points.

"One of my favorite drawings of a rabbit involves 5 brush strokes—big ears and a round tail are probably enough to ID the animal as a rabbit," Dr. Mark Milanick with the MU Department of Medical Pharmacology and Physiology stated in the undergraduate research blog. "What are the key points of your results? (Are whiskers really important?)" This underscores the brevity of a poster. After all, the amount of space to present the research is limited. Trying to visualize the ideas of the research also serves to give more white space for the reader. This gives the eye space to rest and allows more information to be understood. A poster is an interactive media. You will be there to fill in any gaps.

When you've completed the final draft of the poster print out a paper size copy to proofread. Have your colleagues and your friends review the poster. It should



McNair Scholars present their research posters at the 19th Annual McNair Scholars Conference, April 2008.

be able to speak to a wide audience of both experts in the field and those that are unfamiliar with your topic. Here is a chance that you can edit it ruthlessly and remove or clarify different aspects of it.

Take a few moments to develop a spiel on the poster. People will visit your poster for various reasons. Some may be vaguely interested, so be prepared to discuss the key points quickly and allow them to go on. Others may be familiar with the topic, and want more in-depth information. For all visitors, be conscience of the person's time. There may be a lot of posters to visit in a limited amount of time.

Finally, consider keeping a log of who stops by. Posters sessions are a great opportunity to network and meet people specific to your field. One poster presenter realized later that they had just spoken to a Nobel Prize winner in her field. Because she had a log of each visitor she was able to email him and thank him for stopping by. These connections will serve you well in the future.

Scholar Spotlight: Michelle Clark

Participating in the McNair Scholars Program as a junior gave allowed me to get involved in research earlier than I would have otherwise. I worked under Dr. Judith Goodman, studying the noun bias and word learning in toddlers. My research project was titled “Salience of Word Learning in Children”. We sought to discover whether verbs are placed in perceptually salient positions in speech directed to young children. This question is of interest because young children’s vocabularies contain a disproportionately high percentage of nouns. For this project, I transcribed child-directed speech and coded the occurrences of nouns and verbs. Nouns were highlighted by presenting them in sentence final position (96% of occurrences). Verbs, however, were also highlighted (81%) by presenting them in isolation, in final position, or followed by an unstressed pronoun. These findings help explain how verbs are learned and have implications for interventions for children with vocabulary delays.

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I presented my research at the McNair Scholars conference in April 2008 and I did a poster presentation at the University of Missouri Creative Arts Undergraduate Research Forum in May 2009. Those two presentations prepared me for a poster presentation at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association’s (ASHA) convention in Chicago this past November. Attending the ASHA convention allowed me to meet professors from potential graduate schools and gain knowledge about current research in the field.

As a senior, I have continued working on my McNair research. I enrolled in a research apprenticeship through the communication science and disorders program and have been transcribing and coding more children to increase our data set. I also have a clinical apprenticeship in our department’s preschool for children with speech and language disorders. It has been a wonderful opportunity to apply what I learned in my research of language acquisition to further the preschooler’s speech and language development.



2007-2008 McNair Scholar, Michelle Clark, shown here watching a video of a toddler as he perceives an unknown object and begins to associate a word for that object.

Participating in the McNair Scholar’s program as a junior also allowed me to get a head start on graduate school preparation. When it came time to start the application process, I felt I had all the knowledge necessary to choose schools and begin applications. Speech-language Pathology programs tend to be very competitive, so I applied to ten schools. I applied to University of Florida, Florida State, University of Maryland, University of North Carolina, Rush University, Northwestern, University of Missouri, Ohio State, University of Georgia and Vanderbilt. My application dates ranged from December 22nd to February 1st. I completed all my applications during winter break and am currently waiting to hear back from all the schools.

My experience in the McNair Scholars Program has given me the tools necessary to be successful in graduate school. The research I did and conferences I attended also really helped me to become a more competitive graduate applicant. I can honestly say that deciding to apply for the McNair Scholars Program was one of the best decisions I made while at Mizzou. It was a lot of work, but the benefits I gained were well worth all the effort I put in. Thanks to the McNair program, I am one step closer to my goal of getting a PhD in communication sciences and disorders.

Time Management or Procrastination

a special article by Darlene Dixon

The spring semester is a busy time for McNair Scholars. Not only are you working on finishing up your McNair research, you're also creating a poster and oral presentation of it. Add to that class papers, tests and, for the seniors, waiting on graduate school admissions and suddenly time can begin to slip away.

Many of us are faced with becoming a procrastinator when there is so much to do and so little time. The best advice is to maintain a daily or weekly task calendar to achieve any and all tasks. There are several good tips on time management that when incorporated in your daily life that will become second-hand occurrences.

- Take 10 minutes every day to make a to-do list for the next day or for tasks to accomplish during the day. By making a to-do list you can then decide which task has the highest and lowest priority to accomplish.
- Spread out your tasks so they are easier to manage and accomplish. Don't try to write two large papers on the same day. Allow yourself adequate time to finish each task.
- Identify your biological highs and lows. Are you best in the morning or afternoons? Make sure to reserve when you are at your best to tackle the most difficult tasks.
- Prioritize your extra curricular activities and leadership roles in organizations. These roles can lead to not accomplishing your tasks. So decide now which of these activities will benefit you as you enter graduate school. This is also something to consider as you enter your final year as an undergraduate.
- Incorporate the word "No" in your vocabulary. You can't be at your best and your tasks can't be accomplished if you continue to take on extra outside activities or responsibilities. By saying "No" you'll have a healthier body and mind.
- If you are given deadlines to meet, it's best to stay on or ahead of them. Successful people

keep track of deadlines for submission of applications, timesheets, etc., because they are the only ones who can and will ensure their success.



- If you get interrupted, ask yourself what is more important: not finishing this task and have it haunt me or playing Frisbee with the gang. I think you can do the math in this situation.
- Give yourself rewards for successfully accomplishing all your tasks for the day. Or give yourself mini-rewards as you complete each task individually.
- Don't waste time and energy complaining when accomplishing a task. Work through the problems, seek assistance if necessary or better yet start over.

These are good tips to apply to your daily life before you enter graduate school or your final years as an undergraduate. We want to see you succeed! These tips are beneficial in keeping yourself sane when you're overloaded with courses, research and life. Time management is all about creating a little, if not more, organization into your life. It's also about making intelligent decisions about when it is easiest and most efficient to get your work done.

As you see by incorporating the skills mentioned above, you'll be able to prioritize your tasks and tackle each one in a logical manner. These skills will bode you well in the future.

Much success!!

Adapted from: http://gradschool.about.com/od/studytips/Study_Tips_for_Graduate_Students.htm



Presenting Research On Campus

McNair Scholars have many opportunities to present their research on campus. We encourage all McNair scholars to present at these conferences if they're eligible.

20th Annual McNair Scholars Conference: (Conference Saturday, April 18, McNair Scholars Only) Scholars will present both a poster presentation and a 5-7 minute oral presentation, followed by a recognition luncheon.

Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievements Forum: (Conference April 27, Registration due March 15): Open to all undergraduates, scholars can present a poster presentation on their research. Additionally, scholars may compete for a \$500 Chancellor's award in undergraduate research to the MU Bookstore.

<http://undergradresearch.missouri.edu/forums-conferences/forum/index.php>

Life Sciences Week Poster Session (Conference April 13-17, Registration due March 16): Scholars in the life sciences field can present a poster in five separate categories. Space is limited and is allocated on a first come-first served basis. <http://lifesciencesweek.missouri.edu/>

Undergraduate Research Day at the Capitol (April 21 Registration due date already past). Scholars can present their research to state legislatures in Jefferson City. <http://undergradresearch.missouri.edu/forums-conferences/capitol>

Look for other undergraduate research presentation opportunities in your majors by asking your mentor and visiting your department. There are several smaller conferences on campus that will give you the opportunity to present your research even more.

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