LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

There comes a time when one's future may depend on being aware of one's problems, being imaginative enough to see solutions, and being courageous enough to take bold steps. This, in my view, is such a time.

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Relative Advantages and Disadvantages of Poster Presentations at a Scientific Meeting

This year, because the scientific Program Committee for the 1979 Annual Meeting believes that poster sessions are a desirable form of scientific presentation, we encouraged a wider use of poster presentations as a primary method of reporting research and clinical work. Although the meeting abstract form requested designation of the author's preference, the final method of presentation was at the discretion of the Scientific Program Committee.

Most scientists are accustomed to presenting their work in the traditional oratorical style and initially are opposed to, and resist, presenting in a poster session. When queried after a poster session, however, nearly all authors are impressed favorably and state that they would like to present future work in a similar poster session. The audience is almost uniformly positive about poster sessions, both as attendees and as future presenters.

A poster or booth session is best suited for describing an apparatus or an experimental method, but it is also useful to present results of a study. The poster presentation format is not well suited for a theoretical discussion. Some relative advantages and disadvantages of participation in a poster session are listed below.

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<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<td>1. Less formal, more time, more personal, and less anxiety-provoking for the presenter.</td>
<td>1. The presenter is not able to view other presentations at the same session.</td>
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<td>2. There is a two-way information exchange: the audience is more likely to question, and there is an opportunity for detailed discussion.</td>
<td>2. The presentation reaches fewer people.</td>
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<td>3. It is possible for coauthors to participate directly in the presentation and discussion.</td>
<td>3. The presenter may have to repeat the presentation several times; the overall delivery is more tiring for the presenter.</td>
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<td>4. Although fewer people may &quot;get the message,&quot; those that attend are usually truly interested and may have a personal interest in or first-hand knowledge of the work.</td>
<td>4. Contradictory results from separate groups cannot be debated publicly.</td>
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Overall, the acceptance and popularity of poster sessions is due to the fact that the sum of the attributes outweighs the undesirable features. Many large and prestigious scientific organizations rely heavily on poster presentations as a major method for the dissemination of research results at domestic and international meetings. Included in this group are the Federation of American Scientists of Experimental Biology, the American Federation for Clinical Research, the Clinical Radioassay Society, the American Heart Association, the Biophysical Society, the American Chemical Society, and the American Society of Biological Chemists. As early as 1973, the organizers of the 9th International Congress of Biochemistry assigned more than 75% of the preferred papers to poster presentations, and this format has proven to be increasingly popular throughout the scientific community. The SNM meetings have included poster presentations in the past, but I would predict a much wider use in future annual meetings.

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REFERENCES

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