

GUIDELINES FOR TECHNICAL FORUM PRESENTATIONS

AT FOREST PRODUCTS SOCIETY CONFERENCES
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What Is a Technical Forum?

A Technical Forum consists of a number of simultaneous presentations by individuals who are assigned a “booth” space, similar to the typical exhibit booth, in a large meeting room. Each speaker’s space contains a 4’ x 8’ poster board on which an abstract, key points, conclusions, and charts, tables, or diagrams can be posted (see Figure 1). A small table is provided to display preprints or samples related to the presentation. Each speaker’s space is sufficiently separated from others to minimize sound interference. The Technical Forum usually lasts 2 to 3 hours, during which time the attendees are free to “browse” among the presentations of interest to them and speak directly with presenters.

Why Technical Forum Presentations?

When a lot of technical information has to be presented in a limited timeframe, the traditional approach has been to schedule concurrent sessions. Meeting attendees are then forced to choose from among the presentations, limiting their access to the whole body of information being presented. The Technical Forum gives attendees exposure to all the available information. There are many other advantages of the Technical Forum format for presenters and for meeting attendees, some of which are outlined below.

Advantages for You as the Presenter

First, few people are really trained to give formal technical presentations. While you may be a very skilled researcher, industrialist, etc., you probably have not had much opportunity to cultivate your formal speaking skills. In a Technical Forum, however, you can utilize skills you are very familiar with...talking to one person or a few people rather informally about your work.

Second, you can get “on-the-spot” feedback from friends and colleagues. Their comments and critique can be invaluable to you in understanding loopholes or over-sights in your thinking. They might also pose questions that you might not know the answers to and may want to pursue.

Third, you can make maximum use of your visual aids. Your charts, graphs, examples, and audio-visual materials will be available for viewing for several hours, giving meeting attendees an opportunity to study them, instead of having only momentary glimpses of them on a screen. This is helpful to you and to the attendees. You will have fewer items to clarify and attendees will learn more about the subject you are presenting.

Advantages for the Meeting Attendee

First, the Technical Forum format allows attendees to be more selective. They can spend a considerable amount of time at presentations that are of the greatest interest to them and can “window shop” at other presentations.

Second, the speaker is officially available to answer questions. All attendees are free to ask questions and to hear other attendees’ questions and comments, a very helpful part of the learning process.

Third, the attendee is more involved. A very important part of the learning process is the learner’s personal involvement. Technical Forums maximize this educational concept.

Preparing a Technical Forum Presentation

- 1) All materials to be posted on the 4' x 8' board must be prepared in advance of the meeting. You will not be provided with materials to draft your displays on site.
- 2) You must supply an abstract that briefly summarizes your work.
- 3) It is suggested that part of your visual display include a list of key points and a brief summary of results or conclusions.
- 4) All textual or illustrative material should be kept simple; text should be lettered in letters at least 3/8" high so the text may be read at a distance of 4' to 6'.
- 5) It is not necessary to be "arty" in preparing visual materials for display. Please remember that simplicity and ease of reading are more important than artistic embellishment.
- 6) Provide a logical sequence to the display and avoid crowding of visual materials.
- 7) Do not mount materials on heavy or dense stock as it is difficult to pin these items to the poster boards. All adhesive materials for posting are prohibited.

Helpful Hints

- 1) You should be prepared to bring a supply of business cards or some other means of quickly distributing your name and address to attendees. You may also wish to provide sign-up sheets to record the names and addresses of individuals who want more information following the meeting.
- 2) Providing a limited number of preprints (50-100 copies) of your presentation for the most interested attendees can be very helpful.
- 3) Have a 3-minute oral summary prepared, but don't do all the talking. Be prepared to "exchange" information, not just pass it out.
- 4) Don't allow any one attendee to monopolize your time.
- 5) You may wish to bring a small measuring tape to use when mounting your display materials.
- 6) Do not put your poster material in your checked luggage; always carry it on the airplane. Many speakers have been disappointed because their checked luggage was misdirected or lost.
- 7) Don't use thick (over 1/16") backing material for your display. In many cases the boards must be moved from one room to another, and materials may fall off the boards during the move.

Figure 1. — Typical Technical Forum Display.

