

# Engaging Conference Presentations

Dr Sara Shinton

[www.shintonconsulting.com](http://www.shintonconsulting.com)

# Introductions

Me

PhD Chemistry then two post-docs

Careers and Academic Development 3 years

Researcher development and academic  
leadership – since 2000

# Introductions

You (in pairs...)

Your subject area and stage of research

Concerns about presentations or conferences

Hopes for this session

# Anticipated outcomes

Presentation skills tips

Posters

Oral presentations

Dealing with questions

Making the most of conferences

# What are conferences for ?

## Now

Build reputation and impact

Present your work

Understand different perspectives

Get advice on particular problems

Find out about other meetings and professional opportunities

# Now and in the Future

Meet your professional peers

Meet potential employers (and their groups)

Find partners for collaborations

Hear and see areas of current active research in your field

Talk to role models about how they got there

# Why are conferences great for research students ?

# Why are conferences great for research students ?

Good equalisers

Direct connection with key researchers

Social network

Job opportunities

Access to collective intelligence

Showcase your skills and views



# Pre-conference

Arrival and departure

Programme

- Highlight key talks

- Work out your 'path'

- Down time

Delegates

- Go through list

- Make connections (via your supervisor)

Feature of virtually all scientific,  
health, technical conferences

Less common for Arts and  
Humanities research communities

How many of you anticipate  
presenting your research in poster  
format?

# Best Practice for Posters

# Two quick questions...

What actually is an academic Poster ?

Why has it evolved as a communication mechanism ?

# What is a Research Poster ?

Oral pres  research poster  journal piece

Static display with a mobile audience

An effective and economic communication...

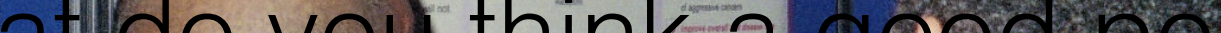
... a 'shop window'...

One means of starting conversations

Generally NOT a description of your whole project



Why did it stick in your mind?



What do you think a good poster should have / be ?



# 5 Golden Rules

Follow the guidelines

size

orientation...

Remember posters are still, audiences move

Make it easy, make it flow

Catch their eye and then control it

5 minutes from 5 feet



**Say the first number to catch your  
eye...**

7

5

2

3

1

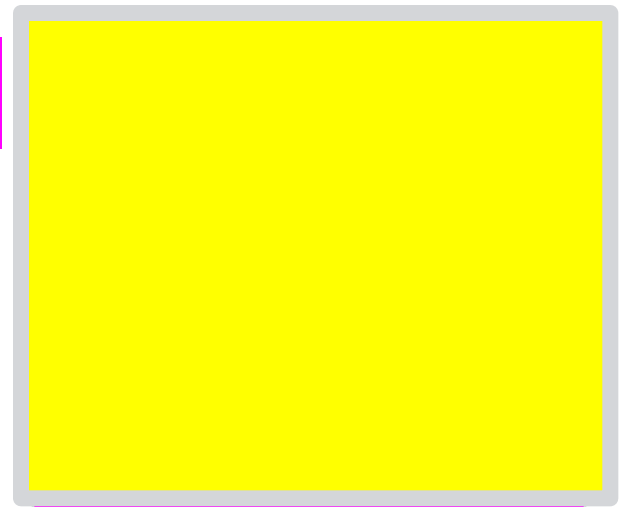
4

9

6

8

# Made Up Title to Illustrate a Point



# 'Defending' Your Poster

- Don't wander off! (Photo on poster ?)
- Be Proactive - start conversations
- Have a 1 minute talk of your poster prepared - remember to stress the take home message
- Handouts (A4 or postcards)
- Table provided at the venue ?

# *In one minute...*

*Hook    Why is this issue important ?  
          Who should be interested ?*

*Outline        Briefly (jargonfree) what did you do ?*

*Outcomes*

*What did you find / what are you hoping to find ?*

*Towards        What do you want ?  
                    What does the future hold ?*

# Effective Oral Papers

Basic advice

Avoiding common mistakes

Engaging with your audience

Structuring your presentation

Basics of PowerPoint slide design

# Effective Oral Papers

**What concerns you  
most about giving  
presentations ?**

# Basic advice

Have a clear simple aim

Target your presentation to achieve this

In planning, imagine your audience asking “So What?”

Start by preparing an outline

Say your piece!

Adopt a style to suit the message and audience

Finish with a summary

# Getting it wrong

Using your experience as audience members :

What bad habits of presenters really irritate you?

What will you never, ever do ?



# Getting your talk RIGHT

What are your audience expecting ?

Timing is KEY

Identify 'hooks' - questions are one example

Learn from good practice

Engage the audience

Handle questions (more on this later)

# Engaging your audience 1

## Voice...

- volume

- pitch

- pauses

## Non-verbal communication

- body language

- eye contact

# Engaging your audience 2

When are you most receptive to information ?

What affects the way in which you listen to and absorb presentations ?

Why do you remember certain things ?

# Audiences are receptive

At the start and end

When information is in context and relevant

If they can reflect (pauses or questions)

If they are engaged

When their memory is assisted...

good structure

quick reviews

links

visual aids  
consulting



# Common Structure

The Meaty Sandwich

Introduction

Main content

- 2-3 main points

- Evidence

- Transitions between points

Summary (highlight to audience to allow time to prepare for questions)

Other structures possible...

# Whatever the structure, answer these questions...

What is the key message in this presentation ?

Why is this of interest to the audience ?

What information do I need to tell the story ?

What strategies can I use to ensure the audience listens and absorbs ?

# Effective PowerPoint

Why are visuals important ?

Audience expects reinforcement

Each slide has a purpose (to reinforce message, explain a concept, or entertain)

Maintain attention with variety

Remember a presentation is your big chance !

# Avoiding common mistakes

This slide contains much too much information and it isn't really written in bulleted or note form. In fact, these are all complete sentences. This is not necessary and makes it much harder to digest and possibly rather boring. If we also introduce unnecessary repetition in our explanations then this is going to make reading long paragraphs like this really really tedious. It would be even worse if I was to then start reading out this paragraph....!



# Avoiding common mistakes

Better to use 4 to 5 points per slide

Note form for everyone's benefit

Delete words you don't need !

Only around one or two slides per minute

# Text - font

I'm using Helvetica– quite plain sans serif

This is Arial – another common choice

Your preferences ?

This is Noteworthy

Note: AVOID ALL CAPS !

This is Times New Roman

# Text - font size

This is font size 40 point

This is font size 32 point

← I'm using 30pt

This is font size 28 point

This is font size 24 point

Note: May depend on room...

This is font size 20 point

# Text – font style

All of this text is 30pt Tahoma...

**Bold is best reserved for titles**

or perhaps for occasional special **emphasis**

Underlining not favoured – can be less readable

Be careful with colours...

# Text – colours

Need contrast with background...

...eg. this may look fine on the PC...

Don't routinely use colour for emphasis as it can get rather annoying

Be careful with red green combinations...

# Images and Style

Individual images *can* reinforce messages

But avoid backgrounds that are too 'busy'

Make sure text is still easy to read !

Try to make it individual to you...



# Images and Figures / Tables

Use graphs instead of tables where possible

Avoid distractions

- shading

- minor gridlines

- appropriate significant figures

Use appropriate style of graph

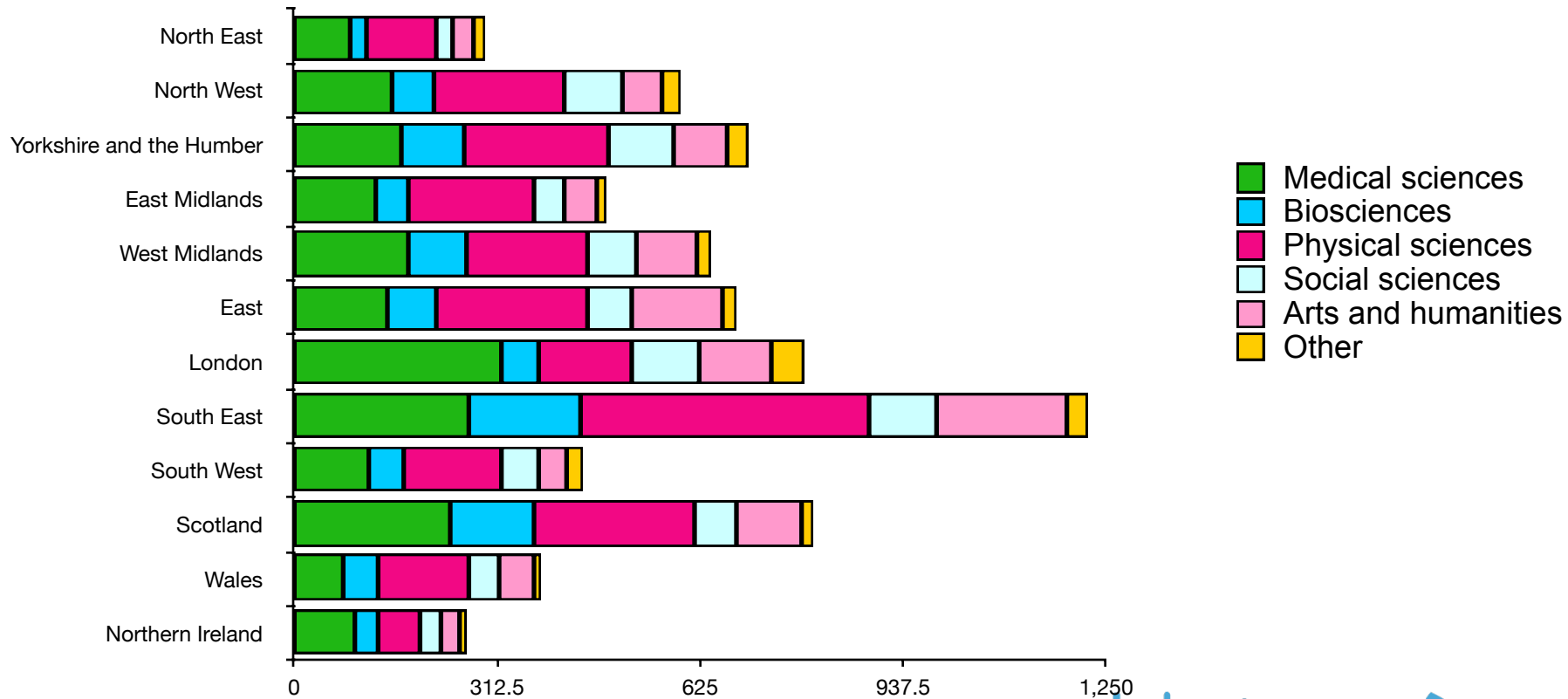
Split up if too complex

# Extreme Example... Yuk !

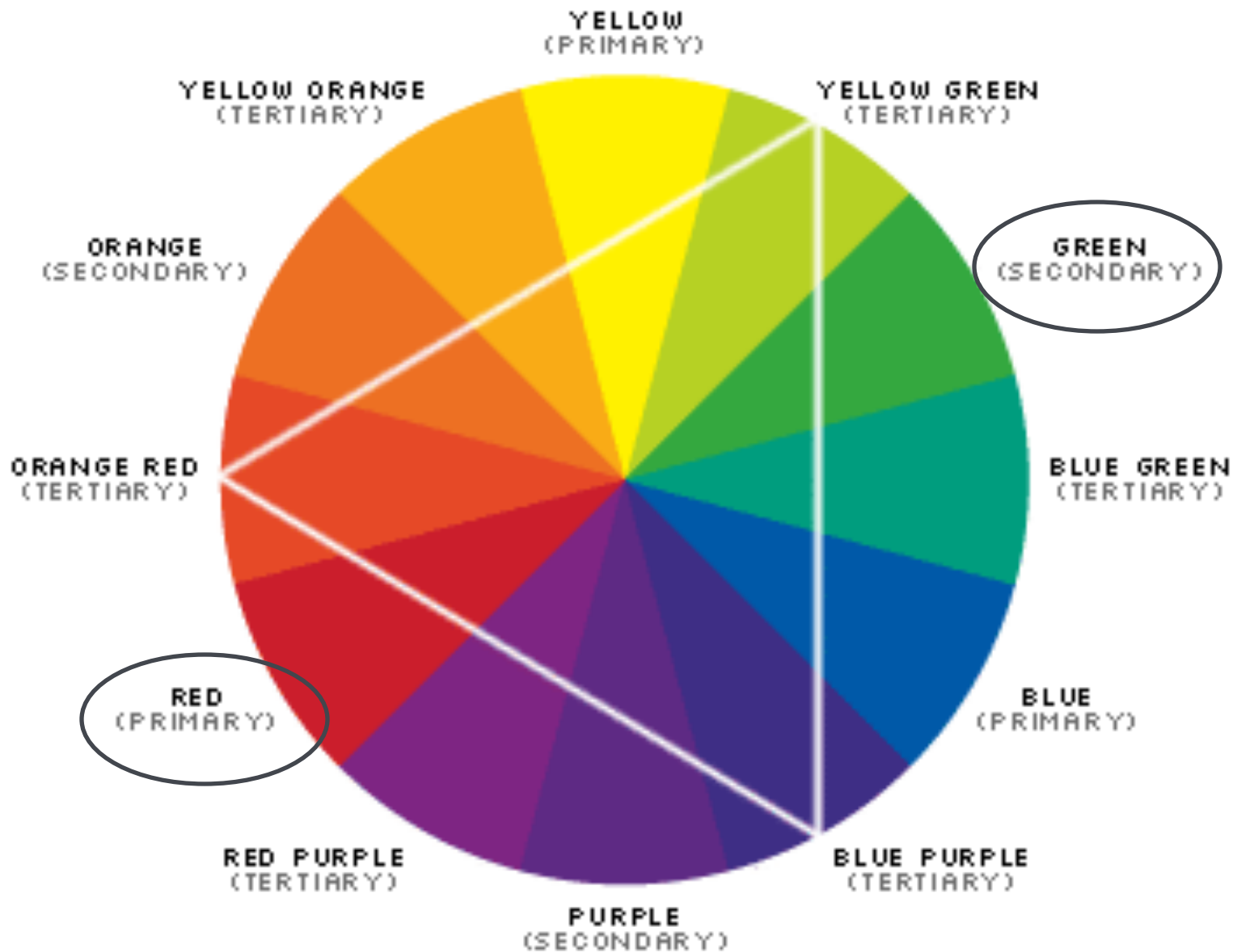
	Medical	Bioscience	Physical	Social	Arts and Humanities	Other	Total
North East	85	25	110	25	30	20	295
North West	150	65	200	90	60	30	590
Yorkshire and the Humber	165	95	225	100	80	35	695
East Midlands	125	50	195	45	50	15	480
West Midlands	175	90	185	75	95	20	640
East	145	75	230	70	140	20	680
London	320	55	145	105	110	50	790
South East	270	170	445	105	200	30	1220
South West	115	55	150	55	45	25	435
Scotland	240	130	245	65	100	20	795
Wales	75	55	140	45	55	10	380
Northern Ireland	95	35	65	30	30	10	265
UK Total	1950	895	2330	810	1000	285	7270



# UK PhD Graduates 2004



# Complimentary Colours



# Backgrounds & animations

I tend to favour plain backgrounds

You may have a University / Department or even group template

Free templates are available:

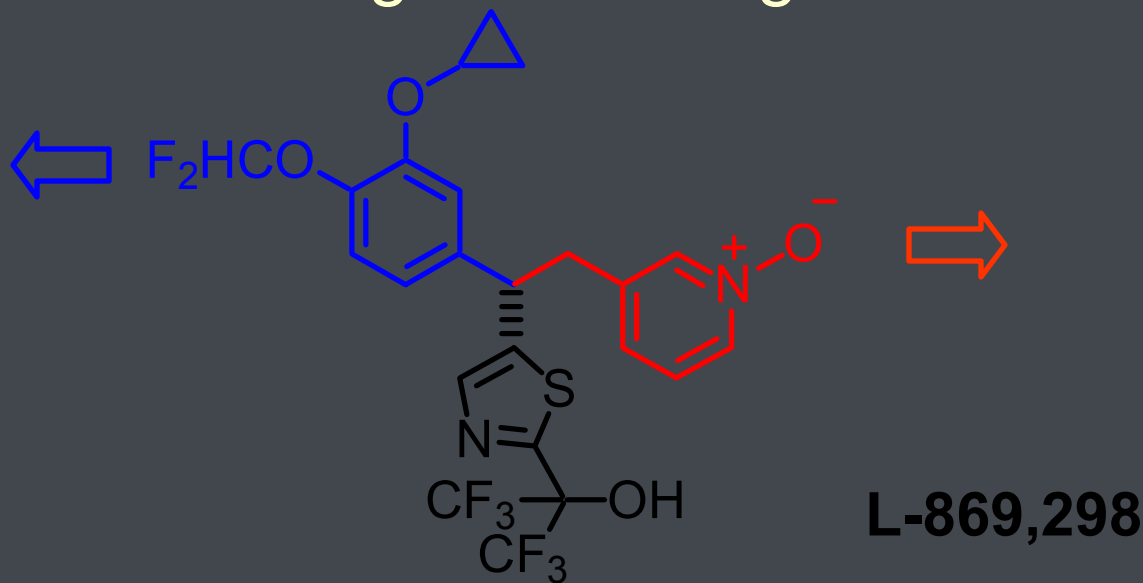
[www.presentationmagazine.com](http://www.presentationmagazine.com)

# Backgrounds and animations

I tend to favour plain white backgrounds

## But dark backgrounds favoured by many

## Can be useful if using colour in figures...



# Animation

Be careful with animations

Too many animations can be irritating

Subtle animations work best (!)

But animations v useful for complex figures

Same advice applies to slide transitions...

# Final PowerPoint issues

Proof read carefully !

Use the tools available in the software

some simple ones are 'B' or 'W'...

but if using more advanced features...      ...check  
which version of PP is available at venue !

Try to keep the file size manageable

Have a back up plan in case of disaster !

# Dealing with questions

you are still the expert – maintain your style

use other expertise (“perhaps someone from the group could answer that question”)

admit you don’t know... but offer to follow up with an answer

repeat question back before answering so rest of audience can hear

ask for clarification if you aren’t sure

# Asking great questions

conferencing <http://pear.ly/8a31> via @pearltrees  
#researchlife



# When the dust settles...

Evaluate and reflect

Ask for feedback

Did I speak clearly ?

Did I look at the audience ?

Were you interested in what I was saying throughout ?

Did you understand the technical/complicated aspects ?

Were my visual aids used to good effect ?

What were my strong points ?

What might I improve ?

# Your network chain

Grows weaker as you move further away

Gets bigger as you meet more researchers and join new networks

Needs maintenance !

# Broadening your network

Professional bodies - get involved at local level, join committees, go to meetings

Alumni - see if your institution connects people / offers careers connections

Current position - any committees you can join ?

Go to public lectures and high profile presentations

Take advantage of social networking possibilities...

# Openings

Eye contact / watch body language

Wait for natural break in conversation then introduce yourself

Find a useful ice-breaker

“Which posters have you enjoyed reading ?”

Consider...

What do they want to know about you ?

How can you help them ?

# Survival - be at your best

Plenty of sleep

Moderate food and drink intake

Have some down-time

Afterwards, reflect - what could you have done better ?

# Final thoughts

Conferences are an essential part of academic life

They should be hugely enjoyable !

Work up to it !

Get advice from the experts all around you

# Any questions ?

[www.shintonconsulting.com](http://www.shintonconsulting.com)

*Thank you*