A Student's Guide to Science Conferences

by

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Or, "Woot I'm at a conference! What should I be doing to get the most out of the experience?"

Why Go to a Conference?

1.Learn about the latest scientific results and questions, and determine where you can make a contribution.

2.Share your own scientific results, gaining feedback, and motivation to work on the “next step”.

3.Become part of a productive scientific community, establishing new connections and collaborations.

What to Do?

Attend

Present

Network

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ATTEND ALL THE SESSIONS!

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Optimize Your Schedule

Talks are most effective when you do not sleep through them.

This is the responsibility of both the speaker and the attendee.

Know the Three Primary Types of Session:

Plenary – For all conference attendees, of **general interest**, and scheduled without conflict.

Derived from Latin "*plenum*", antonym of "vacuum".

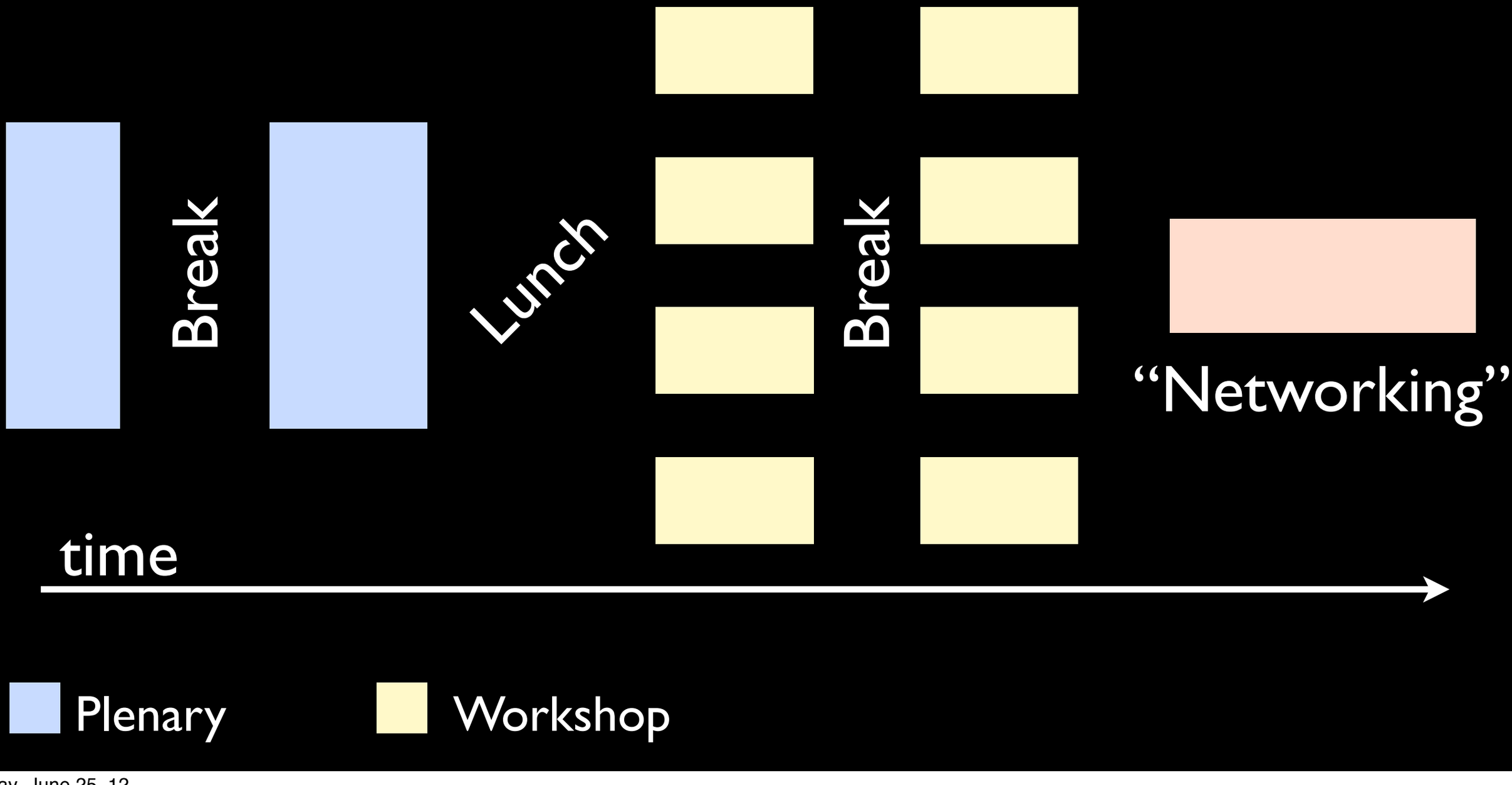
Workshop – Of **focused interest**, scheduled in parallel.

"A meeting at which a group of people engage in intensive discussion and activity on a particular subject or project."

Poster – Presented in parallel to small audiences, with printed visual aids (posters), and refreshing beverages.

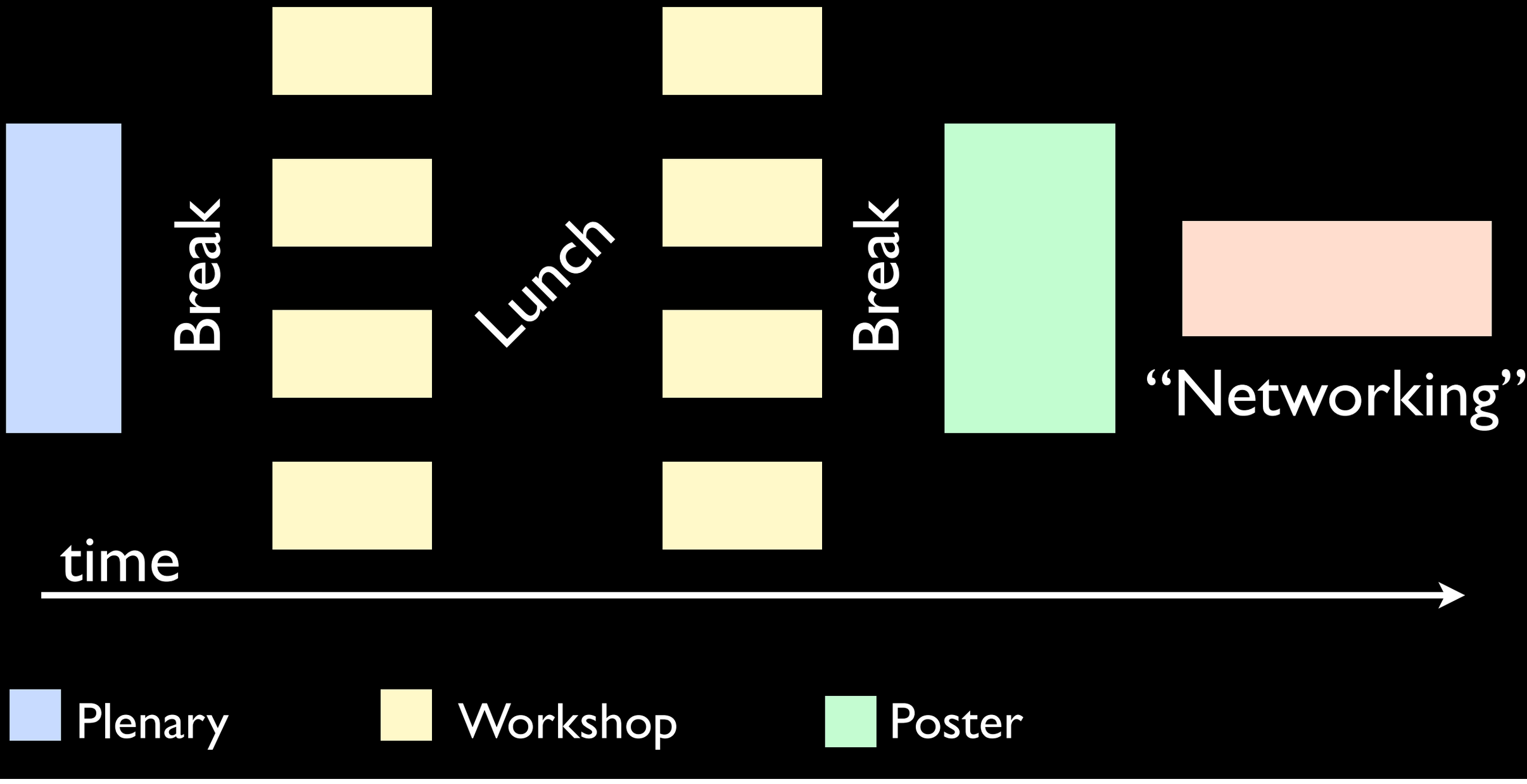
Typical CEDAR Schedule:

(Monday/Thursday)



Typical CEDAR Schedule:

(Tuesday/Wednesday)



Plenary Sessions –

In general, these are sessions that you will almost certainly want to attend.
Make special note of:

1. Tutorials.
2. Post-doc Reports.
3. Science Highlights.
4. Programmatic Reports.
5. The CEDAR Prize Lecture.
6. Sessions Relevant to Your Interests.

Workshop Sessions –

Choose (in advance) to attend workshops which are appropriate for your interests. *Make special note of:*

1. Sessions in which you are presenting.
2. Sessions suggested by your advisor / collaborators / friendly competitors.
3. Sessions relevant to your interests.
4. Sessions targeting students.

...

37. Sessions with comfortable chairs.

The green and very comfortable chairs of the Longmont, Colorado, Conference Center (ca. CEDAR ~2002).

Poster Sessions –

Attend poster sessions, and seek out poster presentations relevant to your interests, or that simply catch your attention.

…do not forget to present your own poster!

Of Special Interest to Students –

Make special note of sessions or events targeting students. *Examples:*

Sunday: CEDAR Student Workshop (ahem!)

Monday: "Introduction of Students by Institution"
Hands-on CCMC Models and Tools for the Ionosphere.

Tuesday: IT-region poster session.

Wednesday: MLT-region poster session.

Thursday: Student Breakfast with NSF.
Announcements of Poster Prize Winners.

What to Take Away:

1.An improved perspective on the current state of scientific knowledge – What has been done, what is being done, and what should be done next.

2.A better appreciation of who is working on what, to motivate future collaborations, and to aid in your search for recent and historic literature.

3.Ideas. Seek new inspiration from diverse sources.

You should probably be taking notes! (quietly.)

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Two Types of Presentation:

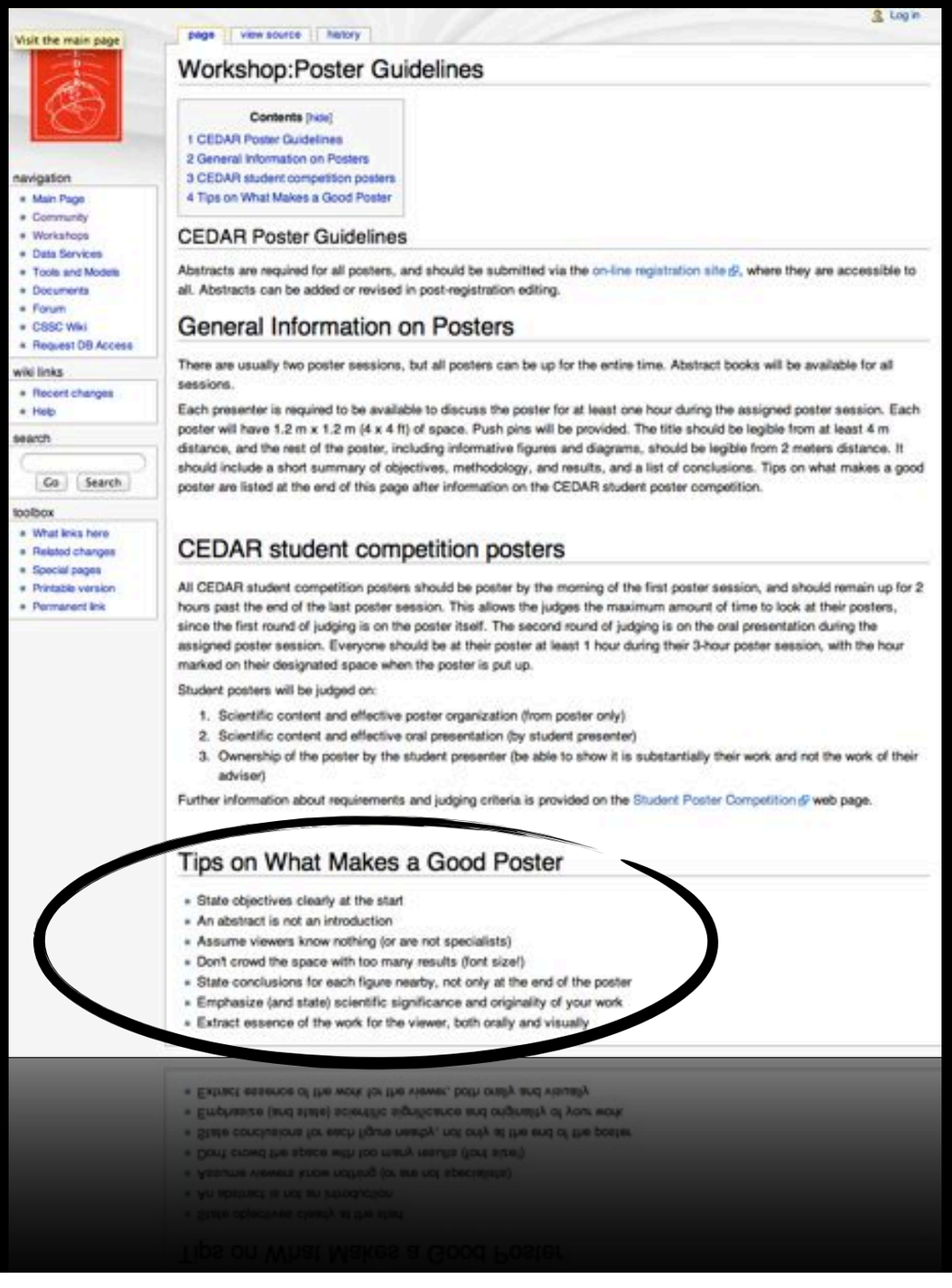
Oral – The classic conference talk, ~10-20 minutes, given in a Plenary or Workshop Session.

Typically presented with the help of Powerpoint, Keynote, or LaTeX "Beamer" PDF files... or, overhead transparencies.

Poster – A more interactive and informal approach, involving ~5-10 minute individual presentations.

Presented on 36x48" printed paper (created with Illustrator, InDesign, LaTeX, or Powerpoint), or on individual printed sheets.

Hopefully you Have Read the Manual:



The Good Stuff is Here:

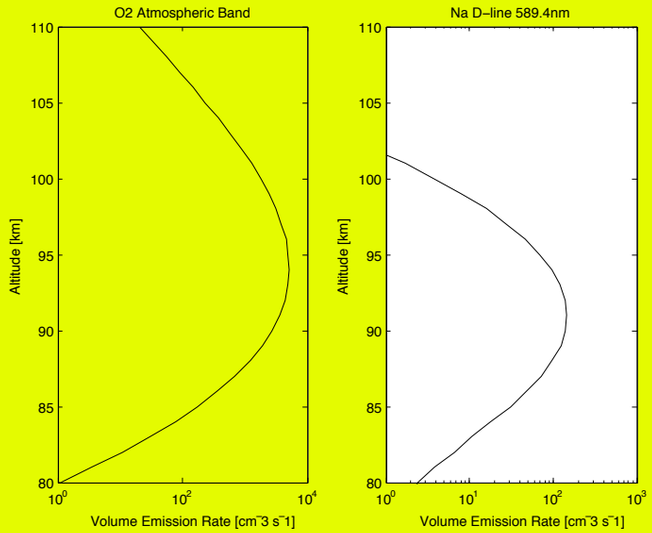
Tips on What Makes a Good Poster

- State objectives clearly at the start
- An abstract is not an introduction
- Assume viewers know nothing (or are not specialists)
- Don't crowd the space with too many results (font size!)
- State conclusions for each figure nearby, not only at the end of the poster
- Emphasize (and state) scientific significance and originality of your work
- Extract essence of the work for the viewer, both orally and visually

Jonathan's Too-Late Tips for Posters and Presentations:

- Have good and interesting research to present!
- Aim to present a *complete story*, structuring your talk or poster as if it were a very short journal paper.
- Pay attention to the *scale and positioning* of figures and text elements, to optimize readability.
- Choose *readable* serif or sans serif typefaces (Times, Computer Modern Roman , Helvetica, Myriad Pro), limiting use of gimmicks (Word Art 3D).
- Use *color* carefully – The poster or presentations' design should not distract from its content.

- Aim to present an incomplete story, because nobody will read it.
  - Pay careful attention to the scale of figures and text elements, to minimize font sizes.
- Choose Comic Sans, Casual, or Chalkboard for Everything!.
- Use color carefully – The poster or presentations' design should distract from its content.



Check this unedited matlab figure!

Why Present?

1. Share recent scientific results,
2. Gain feedback from other scientists,
3. Advertise your achievements.

Presentations provide an opportunity for casual peer-review prior to submitting a manuscript

or

an opportunity to advertise a new publication.

And, If You Enjoy the CEDAR Poster Session, Try AGU's...

(Pack comfortable footwear.)

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Networking:

This is a subtle process that will happen naturally.

Networking ≠ Brown-nosing and schmoozing.

Networking = Building connections, collaborations, and collegial relationships.

You will be networking without even knowing it.

Common Forms of Networking:

1. Competing for coffee and first pick of pastries during scheduled "networking breaks" (use this time to chat!).
2. Skipping a session to discuss new collaborations.
3. Presenting and interacting at the poster sessions.
4. Waiting 40 minutes to be seated for dinner with a group of 14 other attendees.
5. Going out for "beverages" with fellow attendees.
6. Chatting late into the evening about new results, over glowing MacBooks, in the hotel lobby.

A Realization:

People who you meet at CEDAR may some day be:

1. Collaborators,
2. Co-authors,
3. Co-investigators,
4. Co-workers,
5. Supervisors,
6. Competitors,
7. Reviewers of your work,
8. Friends.

Networking:

Is the process of becoming part of the scientific community.

Welcome.