

Tina P. Franks

# Travel companion

## Experiences of a first-time poster presenter

**A**s I traveled to two library conferences, my “travel companion” received countless stares, gestures, and questions from my fellow passengers in the Southwest Airlines terminals coast to coast. Many of them had a look of fear on their faces, thinking that TSA had mistakenly allowed me to travel with a rocket launcher. Alas it’s only an oversized plastic tube for carrying posters.

Although I have 23 years of professional library experience, I’m new to academia, so when colleagues suggested participating in poster sessions, I thought they were joking. They assured me that sessions are popular venues to share knowledge, test research topics, and network with peers. Colleagues shared their stories of incredible competition for only a small number of accepted topics. I heeded their advice and enthusiastically prepared five poster proposals. My mentor forewarned me that all five could be accepted, but seriously, what are the odds of that happening?

Success! I receive a congratulatory email indicating a proposal was accepted. And then I received four more emails. All five proposals were accepted. Oh my!

It’s now June and I’ve spent sleepless nights worrying about transporting posters. My companion and I would need to navigate six different airports and board eight planes during the next three weeks.

In order to accomplish my task, I ordered a 53"x31"x4" poster tube from Amazon. I discarded the option of checking it since it wouldn’t survive the cargo hold

or it could end up in the wrong city. I considered shipping to my hotel, but I had heard unhappy stories about items getting lost. My only option was carry-on luggage.

### Conference #1: East Coast

I’m ready to experience for the first time the challenge of traveling with a poster tube. As I approached the security checkpoint, I overheard a teenage boy complain to his mom. “I told you I could take my fishing poles, that lady is taking hers,” he whined pointing toward me. Fishing poles? I was wearing vacation attire, but I wasn’t planning to go fishing.

TSA didn’t bat an eyelash when I went through the scanners. It was my fellow passengers at the gate who raised their eyebrows and nudged their companions. I hoped they were envious of my early boarding number, but it may have been my companion that resembles a military bazooka that caused hesitation to board our Baltimore-bound flight.

My best option for a worry-free flight was to board early, find an empty overhead bin, and place the tube along the back wall so it’s parallel to the windows, which leaves room for my fellow travelers’ bags.

One challenge (I’m 5’2”) was retrieving my companion. Standing on my seat to reach inside the overhead bin resulted

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in stares and eye-rolling from other passengers.

As I boarded my Boston-bound flight, the perky flight attendant asked, “Just so we’re clear, what’s in the tube?” I replied, “Posters.” She wished me good luck and I quickly scooted down the aisle. Coincidentally, one of the posters was later voted as a “fan favorite.”

My Trusted Librarian poster session was well-attended and the attendees at my science-related poster session offered helpful feedback for an article I was preparing. My travel companion and I had survived the first round of poster sessions.

I’m ready to travel back home. As I enter the Boston TSA Pre checkpoint, an agent points to my companion. While I said “posters” I heard him mention Guns & Roses. I nodded “no” and thought it unusual that he would randomly mention a 1980s musical group, but maybe I misunderstood and he really asked if I was carrying guns or (long-stem) roses.

## Conference #2: West Coast

I’m in the Columbus airport getting ready to travel again. So far, I would rate my poster tube as one of my favorite travel companions. It didn’t provide any arm-flailing tantrums, petty disagreements, or apathetic indecisions.

We’re lining up to board when a woman with crossed arms and a frown tugs at my sleeve and demands to know what’s in the tube. Before I can reply, another passenger turns toward her and says in a snarky tone that it’s a poster tube. I was thrilled he knew it wasn’t a fishing rod tote, but I had visions of airport security removing the pair for a fisticuff and missing our flight.

I’m now boarding a plane in Las Vegas continuing on to San Francisco and the flight attendant greets me by saying “welcome back.” I realize it’s the same attendant who was on my Boston flight. “I recognize you and your tube,” she continued. I now fear I’m on a Southwest Airlines’ Crazy Flier of the Month alert.

While waiting for a hotel shuttle, a man approached and confidently declared that I must be a librarian because I’m carrying a poster tube. As I turn toward him, I notice his wife had a small tube discreetly slung over her shoulder.

I have three posters to present at two poster sessions. During my first session, I had to simultaneously present side-by-side posters on two different topics—whew! My final poster session ended at lunchtime, so I was heading to the airport to travel home.

## Homeward bound

I’m at Chicago Midway waiting for my final flight. My companion and I travelled 5,514 air miles. We also traveled by train, tram, cable car, taxi, bus, and walked count-

less miles. San Francisco’s Powell-Mason Cable Car was the only instance when other passengers didn’t give me the stink eye or select a seat far away from me.

I’ve finally returned to my hometown. I’m exhausted and my companion has a big dent in the side. As the taxi driver places my bags and tube into the trunk, he asked if I enjoyed my vacation and inquires what kind of fish I caught.

I laughed. I guess being a poster presenter is like fishing. I *cast* a wide net of proposals, *booked* the review committee’s interest, and I *reeled* in attendees, but best of all—I ended up with a whopper of a travel tale. *~*



Tina’s travel companion.