

Guidelines for Successful Scientific Presentations

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Ankie Hazen
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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines aim to direct the reader through the process of preparing and presenting scientific communications including poster presentations, oral communications, workshops, and webinars, and to help in ensuring success in scientific fora. A bibliography is included at the end.

The aim of any type of «communication», including a scientific communication, is to transmit a message. For communication to be effective, the message must be understood by all parties concerned.

The necessary precision of scientific communication requires clarity and rigour. Most learned societies, like ESCP, have their recommendations and guidelines for handling and presenting scientific contributions. It is important to note that ESCP uses English as its working language, including at all of its meetings.

Guidance about the preparation and submission of abstracts for ESCP Spring Workshops and Autumn Symposia are presented separately. The requirements of ESCP and of the International Journal of Clinical Pharmacy (IJCP), the official journal of ESCP in which abstracts are published, are set out and should be consulted along with the guidance in this guidance.

Previous versions of the Guidelines for Successful Scientific Presentations (April 2012 [V6.1], April 2015 [V6.2], and May 2017 [V6.3]) were prepared by members of the ESCP Communication Committee. For these versions, ESCP thanks the members for compiling and adapting these guidelines, especially: Johnny Beney, Erik Gerbrands, Marie Caroline Husson Louise Mallet, and Foppe van Mil. The fourth version of the guidelines (V6.4) was adapted by the ESCP Research Committee through the efforts of Ankie Hazen, Martin Henman, Betul Okuyan, led by Anita E. Weidmann.

We hope that these guidelines will facilitate preparation and presentation of high-quality poster presentations and oral communications, as well as organisation of webinars and workshops.

ESCP Communication Committee
April 2012 (V6.1)
April 2015 (V6.2)
May 2017 (V6.3)

ESCP Research Committee
February 2023 (V6.4)

ESCP Research and Education
Committees
February 2025 (V7.1)

PART I

PRESENTING A POSTER

Presentation of a poster allows for a study to be presented and discussed extensively. Presentation of a poster has certain advantages over an oral communication, namely it:

- Allows readers to consider material at their own speed
- Uses visual elements as well as text to convey the content
- Is available for viewing over an extended period of time
- Enables participants to engage in more detailed discussion with the presenter than is usually possible after an oral communication
- Permits the presenter to make contact with others interested in the field of study
- Relieves the anxiety often associated with having to stand up and present in front of an audience, particularly if English is not the presenter's first language.

During all ESCP meetings, at assigned moments, presenters are expected to stand next to their poster and answer questions about their poster to interested participants.

I.1 Components of a poster

The following components should be included in a poster and used as headings where appropriate:

- Title
- Full name and affiliation(s) of author(s), including contact information of corresponding/presenting author
- Background
- Aim
- Method
- Results
- Conclusion
- References
- Acknowledgements and conflicts of interest
- Statement if the study, or part of the study, has been presented elsewhere

The content of these sections should mirror and further elaborate on the content provided in the submitted abstract. Include illustrations (diagrams, pie charts, histograms, photographs) and provide a self-explanatory structured visual design. A poster should not present a page of text.

In cases where you have received feedback on your abstract, use this feedback to improve on the content of the poster.

You may consider hand-outs, exhibits or objects to support your poster presentation, although this is not required.

I.2 Designing the poster

Before attempting to design the poster **ensure awareness of the required size and dimensions for display**. The size of the poster is normally announced in the email acknowledging acceptance of your abstract. Use of portrait orientation is recommended.

The following points should be borne in mind when designing the poster:

- Poster should communicate the message as simply as possible within the scientific structure
- Ensure the presentation is clear, concise, easy to understand, yet informative
- Do not fill poster with too much detail and text and avoid clutter
- Use charts, graphs, diagrams and photographs wherever possible; these need to be easily understood. Photographs, if used, should be original, high quality and non-copyrighted. Consider obtaining consent to use a photograph where applicable.
- Poster should enable reader to understand its meaning without need of explanation from presenter
- Ensure that information in the poster flows well; use headings provided to help format the poster
- Design poster to read from left to right and from top to bottom
- Use bullet lists where possible
- Use headings and subheadings in boldface
- Poster should be easily readable at 1-2m distance; choose simple fonts and format accordingly
- Black is usually best for text of the main body; if using colour use a maximum of 2-3 contrasting colours
- Indicate email of corresponding author(s) on the poster

I.3 Additional considerations

Consider how you will get your poster printed and allow sufficient time for this. It is important to think about transportation of the poster to the conference venue. If travelling by plane, you may need to check with the airline regarding how you can carry on the poster/poster tube. You may need to pay an additional charge or carry in it a larger checked-in luggage. It is now possible to get the poster printed onto fabric which can be folded, but please check that this meets the poster requirements by ESCP.

As a poster presenter it is often useful to have a blank notepad to record the name(s) and address of people interested in your work and whom you may want to contact at a future date. The provision of a QR code is very useful when you are not in attendance at your poster so that interested readers can download a copy or contact you for follow-up.

I.4 Evaluation

At ESCP conferences, a jury composed of members of ESCP committees reviews all posters presented and selects one poster for the best poster award. This committee may invite presenters for discussions. The assessment includes the quality and logic of the content, originality and impact of the project, as well as the layout and organisation of the poster (effective, professional, captures interest, appropriate font size and use of visual aids).

I.4 Troubleshooting

The following are some common problems which occur with poster presentation:

Problem	Troubleshooting
<input type="checkbox"/> Poster not designed for actual space available	➡ Follow poster requirements as stipulated in acceptance email
<input type="checkbox"/> Poster not assembled/organised before the meeting	
<input type="checkbox"/> Poster not displayed at correct time, or poster taken down before correct time	
<input type="checkbox"/> Poster not attended at required time	
<input type="checkbox"/> Print size of poster too small to be readable at a distance	➡ Allow plenty of time to prepare and print poster
<input type="checkbox"/> Too much information and text on poster	➡ Read through and check poster content thoroughly
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor/inadequate use of headers – header letters too small	
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor writing in English	➡ Ask a colleague to check content
<input type="checkbox"/> Poster damaged during transport	➡ Ensure poster is transported carefully in poster tube or suitable container

PART II

PRESENTING AN ORAL COMMUNICATION

Presenting at a conference is an exciting and useful opportunity to showcase original work to colleagues and peers, to receive feedback on the research, and is an opportunity to network. Communicating research findings represents the culmination of the scientific endeavour.

Presentation of an oral communication at a conference is normally restricted to 10-15 minutes, including questions. Presenters will usually have much to say, and far more than can be delivered in the short time allocated. In addition to time constraints, there is the additional predicament that some members of the audience may be unfamiliar with aspects of the work, whilst others will have in-depth knowledge. Presentations must be held in English, and this may present a hurdle for non-native speakers.

These aspects, together with other factors, increase pressure on the presenter. However, with careful planning, attention to technique, and several rehearsals of the presentation before peers, problems can be avoided, enabling an effective and engaging oral presentation to be delivered.

During preparation of an oral presentation, three stages can be identified:

- Collection, organisation and selection of data to be presented
- Organisation of the talk and preparation of slides
- Writing out the talk, performing, polishing, and rehearsing

II.1 Collection, organisation and selection of data

Oral presentations require a good amount of planning. Focus your presentation on the audience. Your presentation is not about how much you can say, but about how much your audience can understand from the information that you are providing. It is generally not possible to present all research data. Concentrate on the salient points to keep the presentation concise and easy to follow, and to keep the audience engaged. Planning a presentation necessitates a very selective approach.

On one of the first slides, select and formulate the question that is going to be answered during the presentation. Identify the main message of the presentation and select 3-4 pieces of evidence that will support the message. Simplify the results into a format which can be easily understood by the audience.

II.2 Organise the presentation

Start by outlining the sections and content of the entire presentation. Create a list of critical points, then carefully sequence and organise the content from beginning to end.

Determine the basic structure of the presentation, which should typically have the following components:

The first slide is a title slide, including title of the study, author(s), affiliation(s), and email of presenting author, followed by a conflict of interest declaration in the next slide, if applicable.

Introduction, Aim, Method, Results and Discussion sections follow after the title slide. A tip is to have the title of each slide convey the key message of that slide.

Introduction	This must set the context of the work and excite the interest of the audience. It must be simple, to the point, and free from jargon. You may choose to create an effective / impactful opening, such as by posing a question or giving a fact. Reveal your topic to the audience and explain why it is important. Your audience will develop an impression of you within the first 15 seconds, so start off right and capture your audience's interest. Presenters should mention if elements of the same study have been presented elsewhere.
Aim	The aim(s) of the work undertaken must clearly set out the purpose of the study and should follow on logically from the introduction.
Method	The details of the methods used will normally be presented in a condensed form. If a new methodological approach has been used or developed as part of the study, more information will be required.
Results	The results are normally the most important part of the presentation. Present the results in a comprehensive and legible format. Spend time describing all aspects of the results and the details of the analysis. A short discussion of the findings is appropriate. Do not show any results on a slide that are not explained.
Conclusion	The conclusions should be a logical development of the results. You should aim to answer your original research question in one or two clear statements, and show an awareness of the study limitations. Do not extrapolate your findings beyond their limitations and avoid making unsubstantiated bold claims. You may include recommendations for further work.

Full citations are usually incorporated within slides at the bottom of the slide rather than as a list of references at the end. A smaller font should be used for references, and including them as a separate text box may give some flexibility to fitting them in.

It is customary and appropriate to acknowledge the efforts of individuals who contributed to the research, as well as any funding. Avoid detailed descriptions of specific contributions individual by individual. You can list the contributors and acknowledge them as a group rather than individually since it is important to work through the slide in a time-efficient manner. Acknowledgements may be done on the title or last slide. End with thanking the audience for their attention.

II.3 Visual Aids

Tips for developing effective presentation slides

In most circumstances the presentation will involve use of a presentation program, such as Power Point. The impact and quality of visual aids may make or break the presentation. Visual aids help to explain your points and add visual interest. Ensure that visual aids augment and enhance what you are saying rather than compete with what you are saying and detract from the points you are making.

The most common problem with slides is too much information/clutter. Keep slides simple, focusing on one idea per slide - **Less is More!** Design visually-pleasing, non-text heavy slides. You may use bullets and keep wording concise using keywords. Consider the '5 x 5 rule' with no more than 5 bullet points per slide and no more than 5 words per bullet point. A general rule is not to exceed 6-8 lines per slide.

Use a variety of slide formats to help maintain audience interest and engagement. Use simple tables, data graphs, schematics, where possible, rather than text. Animations of text or slide can enhance a slide if used sparingly, but do not overdo it. Videos can be useful but it is important to have a backup plan if the video fails. If you have any videos, it is important to go to the conference venue early to try them out and to resolve any issues with the AV support staff.

Ensure that the slide content is readable and legible from a distance with good visibility ideally from anywhere in the room. Use a large point size, around 24-30 pt and simple fonts such as Arial, Tahoma, Calibri, and ensure high quality/resolution of images. Do not put yourself in a position to have to apologise for your slides. Use upper and lowercase text, and if you want to emphasise a point use your voice rather than uppercase text on the slide. Use the middle area of the slide as much as possible. Minimise use of abbreviations to enhance comprehension.

Standardise use of colour schemes to create visual consistency throughout the presentation and to avoid distraction. Consider using institutional colours and approved logos for branding. High contrast between text and background is critical e.g. dark coloured fonts on a light background is easier to read. Avoid busy backgrounds and loud colour schemes.

Always check the allocated time for the presentation and questions. In the case of ESCP conferences, it is usually 10-minute presentation in English, followed by 5 minutes of discussion. You should *never exceed* the time limit. As a guide, the number of slides should correspond to the minutes you have for the presentation (around 10 slides).

Slides which are reproduced from or represent the work of others should be clearly acknowledged, direct quotes need to be clearly referenced and permission to use and reproduce visuals needs to be checked and the source cited.

Report to ESCP booth 2 hours prior to the start of the session to receive instructions on uploading your presentation. You must have your presentation on a USB stick and an easily accessible back up (send an email to yourself).

II.4 Writing, performing and polishing the talk

Having decided on the content of the presentation, prepare the talk in full, taking the potential audience into account. Use a conversational style and avoid too much jargon. Match slides with the presentation talk and ensure that all the slides are used.

Practice is a critical requirement for a successful oral presentation. It is best not to read from a script so that the presentation sounds natural. This helps the audience to feel comfortable and engaged with you and the material of the presentation. However, this may lead to increased use of filler words. Practice minimising use of “fillers” since excessive use reduces comprehension and audience interest. You can use index cards / flash cards to guide you through the presentation, or the slides themselves as prompts. Look at notes or slides very briefly ensuring that you do not turn your back to the audience too often to read from the slides.

Practice to yourself, rehearsing out loud. Time yourself and try to finish with time to spare during practice rounds. If you run over the allotted time in the rehearsal, shorten the presentation instead of speeding up the delivery. Record one or more practice sessions, review the performance and identify opportunities for improvement. Practice in front of colleagues/peers and elicit feedback on your delivery and content. Try to simulate expected presentation logistics when practicing. Practice until the presentation flows seamlessly from the first to the last slide.

On the day of the presentation, dress appropriately and professionally. Be aware of your body posture. Do not hide behind the computer/podium/microphone. You may choose to come out to the side and present there. Maintain good eye contact with members of the audience. Speak at a normal-slow pace and include effective pauses. Use gestures to emphasise points, but do not move about too much. Do not keep turning away from the microphone. Use a laser pointer when appropriate to enable you to highlight important findings, but use sparingly.

The **post-presentation Q&A period** is an important component of any oral presentation. In planning/practicing phases, try to anticipate possible questions the audience may have.

Follow this four-step process to successfully answer audience questions:

1. Listen carefully to the question and acknowledge the question
2. Repeat/Rephrase the question which allows you to ensure you understood the question and that the audience members heard the question
3. Answer the question as clearly and concisely as possible to the best of your knowledge, if you do not know an answer to a question from the audience, be honest and say so and state that you will investigate it further
4. Check for comprehension with the person who asked the question.

II.5 Evaluation

A jury composed of members of ESCP committees reviews all oral presentations and selects one for the best oral presentation award. The Chair of the jury is a member of the Research Committee. The assessment will include the quality of the content, originality, impact of the project and the presentation (professional, confident, logical flow, slides not overloaded, appropriate visual aids, timing, handling of questions). The award for best oral presentation is a free registration for the next ESCP symposium for the principal author.

II.6 Troubleshooting

The following are some common problems which occur when presenting an oral communication:

Problem	Troubleshooting
<input type="checkbox"/> Not respecting the allocated time, either by talking for too long or by having too many slides to present within the allocated time.	➡ Allow time for planning the content of the presentation, design of slides, and to practice the talk.
<input type="checkbox"/> Presentation not audible or understandable (language/volume) - tone and volume of voice monotonous and not engaging.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Reading the presentation from a script or from the projected slides and not looking at the audience.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Slides too cluttered or poorly organised.	➡ Keep slides simple, focusing on one idea per slide and design visually-pleasing, non-text heavy slides.
<input type="checkbox"/> Content of slides e.g. diagrams, graphs not well-explained.	➡ Provide self-explanatory and clearly labelled visuals.

PART III

ORGANISING A WORKSHOP

III.1 Aim of a workshop

The aim of a workshop is to encourage and promote group participation to solve problems and develop skills related to the education or practice of clinical pharmacy.

A factor to consider: the workshop organiser must select a format that ensure that the objectives of the session can be achieved. If not, an alternative format should be utilised.

A clear time plan for the workshop should be set out and adhered to.

ESCP workshops should never be mini-lectures as sometimes is customary elsewhere.

When the call for workshop proposals is issued, ESCP provides a template (Appendix 1) which must be used for the submission and forms the basis of the abstract which participants at the meeting will use to select the workshops that they will attend.

III.2 Workshop proposals

People who wish to organise a workshop during an ESCP conference must apply for it. An abstract/proposal should be prepared for the Scientific Committee of the conference. The headers of the abstract should be: title of the workshop, moderator(s), with affiliations, background, target audience, learning objectives, content and structure, pedagogical methods to be adopted during the workshop to ensure interaction will appear in the final Program.

The Learning outcomes should be formatted as: 'After the workshop, participants should be able to', so that the scientific committee, potential participants and eventual accreditation organisations know what to expect.

Evaluation of workshop proposals is carried out by members of the scientific and organisation committee of the conference. Each workshop proposal is judged independently by all members. Assessment is based on: alignment with theme of conference, clarity of objectives, pedagogical methods, strategic relevance, content, time allocation, achievability and likelihood of appeal to audience.

III.3 Structure

The structure and organisation of a workshop may take one of several formats.

The following is a typical example in which the workshop is composed of three parts:

- a. After the introduction of the workshop leader(s), the objectives of the workshop are identified at the start of the session. Thereafter information is presented by a workshop leader using of visual aids and hand-outs. The time spent on this section should not exceed 20 % of that allocated to the workshop.
- b. The main body of the workshop is designed to allow participants to share their knowledge and interact in a learning situation. Exercises are undertaken in small subgroups on specific topics defined by the workshop leader. The exercises undertaken by each group need not be the same. Participants in each group are required to prepare a report or produce a set of answers or recommendations. A nominated individual within each subgroup makes notes of the group's discussion and reports the findings for presentation to the main workshop group. The time spent on this section of the workshop should be approximately 50 % of the time allocated to the workshop.
- c. In the final section of the workshop each subgroup reports back on the outcome of their discussions. In order to use time effectively it might be convenient for one subgroup to report back whilst others merely contribute their comments or alternative ideas. The open feedback format is often facilitated by use of flip charts. At the end of the session the workshop leader should present a summary.

III.4 Workshop moderators

Normally each workshop will have one or possibly two principal moderators with others perhaps involved as facilitators when needed. (Please note that ESCP will only reimburse the costs for one principal moderator.) Workshop moderators are individuals with a blend of knowledge, teaching and practice skills in the subject of the workshop. Their role is to:

- Define the tasks and objectives for the session.
- Produce a summary and outline of the workshop for distribution before the meeting.
- Produce a list of audio-visual, or other equipment required for the meeting's organiser.
- Prepare hand-outs for the workshop or online information packages for workshop participants.
- Determine the time-plan for the session and ensure it is adhered to.
- Prepare and provide information and tasks for participants and problems or cases for them to work at.
- Facilitate small group discussions and open feedback sessions.
- At the end of the workshop summarise the findings.

ESCP template slides including ESCP logo and the meeting visual logo can be used in preparation of documents.

III.5 Size of a workshop

The maximum size of a workshop group must not exceed 30 participants in order to allow for maximum group participation. Workshop moderators should prepare a workshop with this maximum number of participants in mind. In many circumstances a smaller group may be more appropriate.

III.6 Duration of a workshop

The duration of a workshop is decided by the scientific committee of the workshop or symposium and is announced to the workshop moderators in advance. Workshops may be repeated during conferences. Depending on the programme for the meeting and the subject of the workshop, the time allocated for a workshop would normally not exceed 120 minutes.

III.7 Troubleshooting

The following are some common mistakes made in the organisation, planning or operation of a workshop:

- ☐ Not completing and following the ESCP template (Appendix 1).
- ☐ Inadequate planning and preparation.
- ☐ Not making hand-outs, information or references available for participants.
- ☐ Using the session to present lengthy, formal lecture.
- ☐ Lack of interaction between moderators and participants.
- ☐ Not setting clear objectives and learning outcomes.
- ☐ Not using visual aids, or using them inappropriately.
- ☐ Inappropriate allocation of time to the different parts of the workshop.
- ☐ Not allocating enough time for group work and not carefully selecting tasks, problems and cases for the workshop so that they are relevant, engaging and suitable for the audience and time allowed.
- ☐ Not working with the audience or making the most of the open feedback discussions to guide participants.
- ☐ Not summarising the findings/outcome of the workshop.

PART IV

ORGANISING A WEBINAR

IV.1 Aim of a webinar

ESCP webinars are organized by the Education Committee and are an essential part of ESCP support for its members and their development. Key topics and speakers are selected by the Education Committee with support from other ESCP committees and are based on members' needs and requirements.

Webinars are typically held on the first Tuesday of the month (excepting January, July and August) from 19:30 to 21:00 CEST. They are held via Zoom and are free for ESCP members. Tickets can be 'purchased' through the ESCP website. Webinar attendees are able to provide feedback on the webinars and this information is used to monitor the quality of the webinar series and to consider future topics.

Support provided for webinar presenters

An Education Committee member will approach a speaker to request delivery of a webinar. S/he will liaise with the speaker to produce the advertisement and supporting information for the ESCP website. Information is provided on the structure and support available during the webinar. A pre-webinar meeting is arranged to ensure the speaker can deliver the session via Zoom and answer any queries. The ESCP International Office promotes the webinar and invites the speaker via Zoom. The speaker is supported during the webinar by a moderator from ESCP committee membership. A member of staff from the International Office operates the Zoom platform.

IV.2 Webinar moderators

Each webinar is facilitated by the International Office and a webinar moderator.

The moderator will:

- Introduce the webinar and the speaker
- Review any questions in the chat or facilitate attendees to ask questions
- Ensure that the webinar runs to time
- Reminds the audience that they can provide feedback and promotes the next webinar in the series.

IV.3 Structure

The structure of a webinar can be decided by the presenter(s) and discussed with the Education Committee representative.

It is ideal if the webinar can be interactive allowing participants to take part in the discussion. Interactivity could include:

- Interactive polls
- Case studies
- Clinical questions

The nature of the interaction can be discussed with the Education Committee representative to ensure this can be facilitated on the Zoom interface e.g. breakout rooms.

Webinars are usually formatted:

- a) 19:15 CEST presenters and ESCP representatives join Zoom call to check internet connection and that microphone and slides are suitable
- b) 19:35 CEST participants enter call and moderator introduces the speaker and the session
- c) 20:45 CEST time for questions and discussion; moderator ensures that link for participant feedback is presented
- d) 21:00 CEST moderator closes session.

IV.4 Troubleshooting

The following are some common mistakes made in the organisation, planning or running of a webinar:

- ☐ Not familiar with Zoom system and poor internet connection – Practice using Zoom and ensure a strong internet connection.
- ☐ Lack of interactivity – The session should be as interactive if possible rather than a lecture.
- ☐ Preparing too many slides or information that is unable to be delivered within the time or is delivered too quickly.
- ☐ Not allowing sufficient time for questions and discussion at the end.

PART V

ESSENTIAL CHANGES COMPARED TO PREVIOUS VERSIONS

January 2012: A number of essential changes have been made to this document, in comparison with V5.

- The types of abstracts have been limited to three, with each a distinct format.
- The types of abstracts have now been clearly separated from the fields of clinical pharmacy that the abstract deals with.
- Abstract submitters have no longer influence on the type of presentation that will be assigned to them.
- The Chair of the Scientific committee of a conference may have more influence on the acceptance or rejection of abstracts as poster, poster discussion forum or oral communication within the boundaries of the scoring.

April 2012: Minor changes have been made in comparison with V6.0

April 2015: Minor changes have been made in comparison with V6.1

- The format for Descriptive abstracts has been slightly adapted, now including a result section.
- The exact scoring criteria have been added under VII-3-d.

May 2017: Minor changes have been made in comparison with V6.2

- Format for descriptive abstracts
- Scoring criteria
- The Scoring processes.

February 2023: Minor changes have been made in comparison to V6.3.

- removal of case studies as submission option.
- clarification of text and instructions
- adding new examples for abstracts
- review of the Encore presentations falls to the president of ESCP and the Chief Editor of IJCP no longer reviewers themselves.
-

February 2025: Changes in comparison to V6.4.

- Presenting a poster section updated
- Removal of poster discussion forum and presenting an oral communication section updated
- Organising a workshop section updated
- Addition of a section on organising webinars
- Removal of call for presentations, types of abstracts in ESCP, guidelines for writing a structured abstract and abstract review and selection guidelines - These are available as separate guidelines.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1

TEMPLATE FOR WORKSHOP PROPOSAL

Conference Name:

Theme:

Dates:

Location:

Title of the Workshop

(Additional information if any, i.e. Committee or SIG workshop)

Moderator(s), with affiliations

Background (50-word limit)

Target audience (50-word limit)

Learning Objectives (100-word limit)

Content and Structure, this must include information on time allocation in relation to the structure (400-word limit);

Pedagogical methods to be adopted during the workshop to ensure interaction (100-word limit);

In addition, a short Bio (150-200 words) should be included for each workshop moderator.

Send this proposal to: international.office@escpweb.org