

DocTUM:

Guidance for creating an Academic Poster

Poster presentations

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General points about posters

Posters are a highly visual medium and can be a very effective way of communicating information to a wide audience. The challenge is to produce a poster design that is both **pleasing to the eye and logical to the mind**. To produce an effective academic poster there are a number of things to be considered.

- **Posters are usually read at a viewing distance of more than one metre.** You will need to make sure that your poster is legible and easy to scan at this distance so that your information is understood quickly.
- The temptation to fill the space with as much material as possible should be avoided; poster presentations should never be as dense as a printed page.
- When making posters it is essential that you give careful consideration to their visual appearance as well as their content.

1. Choosing content

It is not like an academic essay in this respect as it aims to relate your research project in a brief and concise manner using bold text and colourful graphics to attract attention.

- **What is the purpose of your poster** - to report findings, present an argument, convince an audience or promote a product? It should convey a strong central message.
- **Who will be looking at your poster** - a specialist audience, the general public, other students?
- **What will your audience be looking for** - detailed information or a brief summary?
- **Where will your poster be displayed** - in a busy conference hall or in your department?
Are there any guidelines governing the content of your poster? These might specify the nature and structure of the material to be displayed (as well as practical issues such as the size of the poster and the size and amount of text to be used).
- Make sure to include web links, references and contact details for further information.
- **Remember, be selective!** Don't try to cover the entire research project. Focus on those aspects which have most relevance for your chosen audience.

2. Layout

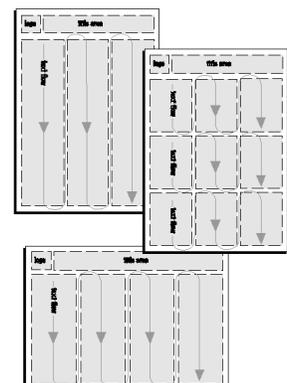
Once you have decided on the content of your poster, you need to consider the way the information should be displayed. A useful starting point is to prepare an outline plan that will help you make the most effective use of the space available to you.

Note: Posters are usually A0, A1 or A2 in size. If the subject matter is not clear from 3 metres away your audience will most likely not approach it. Preferably, **all elements should be visible from at least 1.5m away**.

Structure - Your overall structure should be clear and logical so that the viewer's eye naturally follows the flow of information in your display. To help establish a clear sequence of information, think about planning your poster on a grid system as in the diagram (Fig.)

As you can see, the grids help break down the large space into **convenient sized areas**. Also, two main visual sequences become apparent: rows travelling across the page or columns travelling down the page. These natural 'pathways' can be used to structure your information in both panel and one-piece poster displays, guiding your reader's eye through your information in a logical and fluid way.

Reading order - In the first three seconds of looking at a poster, the reader is deciding whether to stay and explore the poster or move on. The most effective academic posters provide a discernible reading order with a clear sequence of information. A series of columns can be an effective way of ordering information as demonstrated in newspapers and magazines.



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Balance - The best academic posters are well balanced. This means arranging text and images in such a way that both elements are balanced across the poster. Placing illustrations throughout the poster breaks the text up into easily readable chunks and allows for smoother flow. Balance can also mean ensuring that the poster is not cluttered. Blank space is not the enemy. In fact, like images, it serves to make text easier to read, allowing the reader to pause and take note.

3. Text

- **Total text** should be between 300-600 words and should be to the point.
- **Font** - Choose a font that is easy to read at a distance. Most of the standard fonts are fine for this (e.g. Helvetica, Palatino, Times). Avoid mixing too many fonts as this can look messy. Two fonts per poster are often ideal; one for the headings and one for the main text.
- **Type size** - Try to avoid font sizes below 24 which will force the reader to stand very close.
- **Titles and headings** will need to be larger than your main text. Developing a hierarchy of type sizes can help to differentiate between your main body text and the other text elements in your poster. Keep the number of type sizes to a minimum to avoid over-cluttering your poster. Apply your hierarchy to all aspects of your poster design to ensure consistency. Set headings in **BOLD** and make them concise.
- **Line spacing** - Using one and a half or double spacing between lines of text greatly increases the legibility of your poster design.
- **Alignment** - Avoid mixing alignments as this can look very awkward. Left aligned is the easiest to read, particularly when using large type.
- **Case** - Text in UPPER CASE can be very difficult to read, even at close distances. Try to use *Italics*, underlining and CAPITALS sparingly.
- **Group text** - According to subject matter but don't make paragraphs too long. Break up large paragraphs. Bullet points can be used to define simple statements.

4. Graphs and images

Displaying information on a poster gives you an opportunity to represent your data in an interesting and eye-catching way. Think about how your display can be enhanced through the use of illustrations, tables, charts or photographs. The inclusion of one carefully chosen image can be a very powerful way of drawing people's attention to your poster.

- **Numerical data** - When presenting numerical data use charts and graphs rather than tables as these can be more effective for illustrating data trends.
- **Graphs** - When making charts and graphs format them effectively by keeping them simple, enlarging text and thickening lines. 3D graphs can be confusing, 2D are often clearest.
- **High resolution** - for images try to use a high resolution TIFF (.tiff) with a resolution of at least 300 pixels per sq. inch for sharpness (images copied from internet are usually 72 pixels!).
- Include relevant logos of companies/institutions where appropriate.

Showing your poster

Poster presentations can take many forms. Sometimes you will be asked to stand next to your poster, talking to people as they browse and answering questions about your work. At other times, your poster will simply need to 'stand alone' as part of a general display. It might be useful to think about how you can help an interested reader take information away from your poster: printing off A4 copies of one-piece posters or producing bullet-point summaries of panel posters are very effective ways of sharing your information.

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5. Colour palette

Colour can add an extra dimension to your poster design, making a poster more attractive and giving you another method of highlighting particular aspects of your information. Choose colours that work well together so that they don't detract from the information in your display. It is sensible to use a small range of colours (**three colours**) so that your poster doesn't look chaotic.

- When using colour ensure that it does not obscure or detract from the text and images used in the body of the poster.
- Use subtle background colours and black for small text.
- Try not to use too many colours or colours which clash as this can be visually distracting.
- Think about people who are colour blind and have difficulty differentiating colour.
- When printing the poster ensure that colours do not fade or run.

6. Check List

1. Read your poster over carefully to check for spelling mistakes.
2. Stand well back from your poster to see how it looks from afar.
3. Show it to someone who hasn't seen it before and observe their reaction

Summary - 10 tips to make your poster stand out!

1. Make it attractive and immediately catch the eye, making passers-by pause and take a look.
2. Choose a short informative title.
3. Keep the introduction short; avoid just repeating your abstract.
4. Keep it simple: The best, most memorable posters are simple with a clear message.
5. People tend to first focus on the top-left of your poster so put something there that will keep the attention, a picture or graphic.
6. Major points should be bulleted not buried in text.
7. A simple diagram or cartoon is often helpful in explaining your project.
8. Don't fill the poster space with too much information; 4-5 figure panels maximum.
9. Keep it short and simple, emphasising the take-home message.
10. Practice presenting your poster before your attend.