

The Art of Presenting Without Saying a Word: Creating effective conference posters

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An academic poster is very different from an oral paper presentation. It is a visual presentation of your research. It is not simply a matter of copying your journal article into a larger format. You need to be clear, concise and professional.

Nuts and Bolts - components to include:

- **Title Banner** – include your title, your name and credentials, co-authors, academic affiliations
- **Introduction** – clearly defines the research question. Why is this project necessary? Include any necessary background information
- **Methods** – How you approached and executed the study? Include the types of statistical analysis performed. Give enough detail so that another researcher can see that the study design is adequate for the research being conducted. – This strengthens the validity of the results
- **Results** – The findings of your study. Try to represent your findings graphically (charts, graphs, diagrams...)
- **Discussion** – Your interpretation of what the results mean. What new information are you bringing to your discipline? How does your data support your initial research question?
- **Conclusion** – An overview/summary of what was covered. Reiterate the goals of the project. Discuss the future goals/direction/vision of the project.
- **References**
- **Acknowledgments** – include any grant funding agencies

Before you Begin:

- Refer to conference information material to determine the maximum allowable **size** and **orientation**. Size directly impacts how much information you can include.
- Establish a timeline. You want to give yourself time to edit, and time to get feedback from your supervisor.
- Determine where you will be getting your poster printed. Find out how much it will cost, how long they need to print the poster and what file formats they accept.
- You want to check both software availability and version compatibility
- Determine what program you will be using to create your poster (Illustrator, Corel, PowerPoint...).

Layout Design:

- Print out the basic components for text and graphics on 8 ½" x 11" sheets of paper
- On a separate sheet of paper sketch out the basic layout design
- Determine the feasibility of including all components in your design. Generally, you will find that you need less text, more graphics and more 'white' space
- Edit, edit, edit! Your goal is to make the poster succinct, so that it is interesting and inviting
- Provide a clear entry point for readers and a logical visual flow

- Group related information together
- Avoid over simplifying (too little useful information) or over complicating (too much information)
- Use 'white' space and margins to give your content room to breathe

Know your audience!

- Effective communication starts with knowing who your audience is. At poster sessions there is intense competition for audience attention.
- Your language should be appropriate for the group you are presenting to (specialists, related field, general audience)

It's all about the looks

- Within **3 seconds** your audience will determine whether to stay and explore the content of your poster or leave. You need to think about how your poster is going to stand out from all the others in the room to draw people in.
- If they stay you then have **30 seconds** to secure their attention by conveying an overall understanding of your subject matter in an interesting way
- 3 + 30 = Interest

How to get to the "Interest"...

- A poster should be legible from 1 meter, and attract interest from about 5 meters
- Be visually consistent with: Font Selection, Font Sizes, Colours, and Spacing
- Aim for a word count between 300-600 words.
- Break-up large bodies of text using subheadings
- For clarity use sans-serif fonts (For example Calibri, Arial, Helvetica)
- A guideline for text size:
 - Main Title: 70 – 100 pts
 - Subheadings: 40 pts
 - Body: 24 pts

Remember that these are just guidelines, you will need to make a judgement call based on your test prints, the amount of information you wish to include and your space limitations

A Splash of Colour:

- Colours and backgrounds should be subtle. Avoid using unnecessary and distracting background textures and images
- Colour should **highlight, separate, define and associate** information (use it as a tool)
- Try not to use too many different, or strongly contrasting colours. 2-3 colours should be enough
- Be aware that the colours you choose may look different on your screen vs on the printed page. A test print is a good option

What's in a Name?

- Use titles (main titles and subheadings) that grab the attention of the audience. This is what will initially draw them in, so be creative!

Boring	Interesting
Introduction	An Ecosystem Approach to Human Health
Methods	Participatory Research
Results	Survey Says...
Discussion	Challenges
Conclusion	Vision for the Future

Visual Impact

- **EVERY** graphic should have a **PURPOSE**
- If your topic has a central statement, graphic, or diagram, make this prominent in your design. Don't hide it in the corner
- Use diagrams, graphs or flowcharts to help explain complex information visually
- If you are including photos on your poster, adding a small border around them will make them stand out better

Size Matter – Image Resolution

- If you are downloading images off the internet, choose ones that are of higher quality. In Google Images advanced search settings you can indicate that you would like to only search for images with a higher resolution.
- Scaling a graphic image to a smaller size (by dragging a corner of the image) in PowerPoint does NOT reduce the digital file size
- Scaling graphic images to a larger size (by dragging a corner of the image) REDUCES it's resolution
- If you are unsure about the quality of your image, print out a copy of the image at a desired final size and examine
- Lack of attention to image file size can render posters extremely difficult to work with and ultimately unprintable (file is just too large)

Tool Tips

- Use guides
- Snap function (when applicable)
- Use the group tool
- Keep notes on any “special treatments” you do to your graphics
- Include crop marks or a neat line. This is a guide for where to cut your poster after it is printed. If you have a colour in the background and it fills the extent of the poster, you don’t need crop marks. Simply use the colour as your cutting guide
- Print your poster on an 8 ½” x 11” page. All elements of your poster should be legible at this size.
- Deliver the poster to the printer at least 3 days prior to the deadline to accommodate file problems, equipment breakdown and possible work queue at the print shop.
- Handouts available for those viewing your poster at the conference

Great Resources

Creating Effective Poster Presentations

George R. Hess, NC State University and Leon H. Liegel, Oregon State University, 2004

Excellent guide for content and design, complete with samples for review and a 60 minute evaluation, evaluation criteria form and scoring sheet.

www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/

Poster Presentation of Research Work

Ming T. Tham, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2001

Overview of basic development of content and practical advice for technical posters.

<http://lorien.ncl.ac.uk/ming/dept/Tips/present/posters.htm>

Guidelines for Preparing Posters Using PowerPoint Presentation Software

Pam J. Marek, Anderson College, Andrew N. Christopher, Albion College, & Cynthia S. Koenig, University of Florida, 2001

Technical guide for production using features available in PowerPoint.

<http://teachpsych.org/otrp/resources/marek01.pdf>

Where to print on campus:

Ian Craig (icraig@uwo.ca) – Media and Digital Imaging Centre